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errors and deficiencies, of which she is but too deeply sensible.

If one anxious but inexperienced parent is encouraged by it to make the Bible a text-book in conversing with her child, or one child allured by it to resort to Scripture for pleasure as well as instruction, her unpretending object will be accomplished. Maternal experience, should the conversational system be once adopted, will, she is well aware, suggest a thousand improvements on the desultory remarks here thrown out ; and happy will she esteem herself, if, by opening one slender vein of the inexhaustible mine of Holy Writ, labourers more highly gifted may be induced to possess themselves of treasures which her limited powers are quite inadequate to draw forth.

It may be added, as a farther plea to disarm criticism, as well as an encouragement to parents even *moderately conversant* with Scripture, to trust to

it in opening the minds of their children, that the following sheets were thrown together, solely from reflection suggested by a perusal of the chapters themselves, without any reference to human authorities, however useful or eminent ; except such as the writer's memory must of course have unconsciously furnished.

She is not idle or presumptuous enough to imagine that originality of matter, were it even attainable on such subjects, would be any recommendation. She only flatters herself, some originality of manner may have ensued from the substitution of spontaneous thoughts and unstudied dialogue ; for the far abler expositions of which, as a compiler, she might have abundantly availed herself.

To Him, who estimated the widow's "two mites," not by their intrinsic value, but the humble *donor's scanty ability*—this little Volume is in "*trembling hope*" committed—hope that it may

with His blessing, prove a fragment of that "bread" which, cast upon the waters, "returns after many days"—*fear*, lest begun and completed in much imperfection, it should savour so far of human infirmity, as to come short of its ultimate end—the glory of God, in the edification of those "little children, of whom is the kingdom of heaven?"


MORNINGS WITH MAMA.

It was a proud day for little MARY VERNON, when, having fairly entered on her tenth year, she was invited henceforward to come, for a precious half hour every morning, into her Mama's dressing-room, to begin reading with her, for the first time, in a regular manner—(after those prayers with which alone any study of Scripture can be profitably undertaken)—such of the historical books of the Old Testament, as her mother had hitherto considered it premature to put into her hands. Not but that Mary had, from her earliest infancy, been familiar with the delightful narratives of Genesis and Exodus; had traced the Israelites in all their wanderings through the wilderness to the promised land; had followed Joseph from the dungeon to the palace, and David from the sheepfold to the throne, and the infant *Samuel* from his mother's bosom to the priesthood and sovereignty over God's people. These beau-

tiful and affecting histories her mother well knew to be nourishment peculiarly adapted to the youthful mind, and more gratifying to all its unsophisticated tastes and feelings, than the most elaborate fictions of later times.

It was long too, very long, since Mary had read and re-read the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles—(their commentary, the Epistles, was reserved for a more advanced period)—and now remained to be seen, by an anxious Christian parent, whether the softening and purifying lessons of the New Testament could, by the quick intellect and opening faculties of her child,—aided by maternal questions, and the inestimable teaching of the Holy Spirit,—be brought to bear upon and to shed edification over, a perusal of those annals of the monarchs of Judah and Israel, which to the superficial reader, unaccustomed to weigh all human events “in the balance of the Sanctuary,” seem so often barren and unprofitable while, to the humble disciple in the school of religion, “not a sparrow seems to have fallen to the ground,” during their long succession, without a more or less obvious interposition of Divine Providence, and a fulfilment of threats or promises previously set forth.

From the earliest childhood of her daughter *Mrs. VERNON* had pursued—(long before it forme



so prominent a feature in modern education)—that system of judicious questioning, which, by exciting and drawing forth the latent powers and ideas of an infant mind, does more towards developing both, than the most laboured explanations; though the latter are doubtless often necessary to aid the imperfect conceptions, and rectify the mistaken conclusions, of inexperienced youth. But, before imparting to her daughter those sounder views which age and experience suggest, Mrs. Vernon always strove to elicit her pupil's crude, though often wonderfully acute, notions on the subject, that their accuracy might be confirmed, or their fallacy exposed, by appealing to her own more mature consideration.

A general knowledge of the chequered life and occasional failures of David, and of the early choice and subsequent desertion of wisdom by his son Solomon, had already afforded opportunities for exercising the youthful judgment of Mary, and enforcing a multitude of useful lessons; and Mrs. Vernon was not sorry to begin, with a pupil whose predominant failing, like that of most clever children, was rashness and self-confidence, their present course of Scripture History, with the memorable instance of both afforded by the conduct of Rehoboam.

MORNING FIRST.

LESSON.—1st Kings, Chapter XII. Verse 1st to 26th.

MAMA. Well! Mary! and what do you think in general of this story you have been reading?

MARY. Oh! Mama! I think Rehoboam was very foolish to bring mischief upon himself by such a silly answer. He might have been sure people would not stay to be governed by such a cruel and capricious king, if they could choose a better for themselves.

MAMA. Let us investigate this more closely, my dear Mary. In the first place, have we reason to think that Rehoboam had been carefully and wisely educated?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Ah! but you might have suspected the contrary, had you recollected how sadly Solomon, his father, went astray in his latter days. Was a king, who forsook God, and allowed his wives to persuade him to idolatry, likely to bring up his son in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord?"

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. And whose advice did the foolish youth prefer to that of his father's old grey-headed counsellors?—that of his own idle inexperienced companions! Now, Mary, what sort of a character did this give tokens of?—a modest and prudent one?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. What, then?

MARY. A rash and hasty one.

MAMA. Do you know any body, Mary, who sometimes acts inconsiderately, and finds cause, like Rehoboam, to repent at leisure?

(Mary hung down her head and blushed, and said nothing.)

MAMA. But, Mary, we are yet ignorant how Jeroboam (who, we find, had been a fugitive in Egypt,) came to think of being king at all. You must turn back to the 26th verse of the preceding chapter, and tell me who this Jeroboam was.

MARY. The son of Nebat,—a servant of Solomon.

MAMA. Have we any account here of his character?

MARY. Yes. "The young man was industrious, and Solomon made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph."

MAMA. Does not this promotion appear very fortunate for a young man of humble birth?

MARY. Oh ! yes, Mama !—and being promoted for good behaviour, too !

MAMA. Well, Mary ! you shall tell me by-and-by, when we have finished his history, whether he would not have been happier, an obscure but faithful servant, to the end of his days. But we have here a further proof that God sometimes raises up instruments more for his own glory than their own merits or advantage. What befell Jeroboam soon after ?

MARY. The prophet Ahijah met him in the fields, Mama, and tore the new garment that was on him into twelve pieces.

MAMA. What could that signify, Mary ?

MARY. It tells us below, Mama,—it signified the twelve tribes of Israel ; and Jeroboam was to have ten of them, and Rehoboam only two.

MAMA. Dear, dear ! that was a sore judgment on somebody's sins ! Who had so far offended God ?

MARY. (*After a pause.*) Solomon, I suppose, Mama,—for you know he worshipped idols in his old days ; indeed, their names are mentioned here.

MAMA. A shocking catalogue ! I wonder wh God was merciful enough to leave such an idolater's family any share of the kingdom,—can you tell me ?

RY. Oh! Mama! because of good David her.

MA. My dear Mary, I fear we are hardly d in calling him by that name. "There is good but God only." When you see retaining, even in his anger, such mercy and for his erring servant, you must remember for David's uniform steady resistance to y, and for never, even in his deepest trans-ns, forgetting to humble himself before an ed God. You told me yourself, when read-s history, you thought David any thing but and I am sure he thought so of himself, when d, "My sin is ever before me!" But, then, s in private a penitent and pardoned sin-and his public acceptance with God was ed on his stedfast adherence to the worship e Lord, and abhorrence of idolatry. What d-mercies did these qualities in David pur-for his two successors?

RY. They let Solomon remain king quietly s days, I think, and kept two tribes for Re-am.

MA. Very well, Mary. Now, see if you can ie (but not from the book before you), which e promises of God this forbearance con-?—It is one you repeat every Sunday, and ll be glad to find you can apply it.

(Mary's face flushed with anxiety to deserve the praise of an attentive scholar—she thought a little, and then said,)

MARY. Oh! Mama, I have it!—You mean the commandment about God having mercy on good people's children to the third and fourth generation!

MAMA. Very well, Mary. You are right in the main; though you are wrong in limiting the mercy of God to any number of generations. It is only his judgments which he graciously sets bounds to; his mercy, you may remember, extends to "thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments:" and as it was for these very reasons that God regarded the memory of David, we accordingly read here a promise to that extent, and even farther, to his posterity. Can you find it for me, Mary?

MARY. I suppose this is it,—“I will afflict the seed of David, but not for ever.”

MAMA. Very right. What state are the “seed of David” in now, Mary?—Do you know?—Tell me first where David reigned?

MARY. At Jerusalem, Mama.

MAMA. What were the people who lived there called, after their separation from Israel?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Think a little.—What were they called *our Lord's* time?—in the Gospels you read

—Who was our Lord called King of, in
his writing on the cross?

BY. King of the Jews, Mama. They were
I remember now.

MA. Well! does Jerusalem belong to the
till?

BY. I suppose not.

MA. Why do you think so?

BY. Because there are many Jews here very
ble, selling old clothes, and run after by
boys; and I don't think they would stay to
ghed at and pelted, if they had a fine city
at home.

MA. A good conclusion, Mary; and a true
a juvenile solution of their wanderings.
are a race of dispersed outcasts on the face
earth; but why? Can you tell me this,
?

BY. (*Confidently.*) Oh! because they are
ers.

MA. No, Mary; you are speaking as one
perfectly informed of their history. *They*
at now idolaters. That sin was not only
ied, but rooted out by captivity and tempo-
dgments; but they have one even worse
ore dreadful to expiate. What could that

BY. *I don't know.*

MAMA. Oh! Mary; who crucified the Lord of Glory? Who cried, "His blood be on us, and on our children?"

(Mary hung down her head, ashamed of being at a loss on so important a question.)

MAMA. You will never forget that again, my dear, I am sure; nor the reason why Jews are without a home, or king, or city, to this present hour! But will they always remain so?—Think before you answer.

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. What leads you to suppose otherwise?

MARY. It says here, Mama, that the seed of David shall "not be afflicted for ever."

MAMA. Very well indeed! On this very verse, Mary, and an hundred others to the same effect, the poor wandering Jews found triumphant expectations of being restored to their own country; and we Christians are bound to believe and rejoice in it also. What may we learn in the mean time from their punishment? I will tell you. The dreadful danger of rejecting and despising Christ! while their hopes may remind us of the redemption *He* has purchased for ever murderers and despisers, and the faithfulness of God to his promises even unto the end of the world. Who, long before David, had the same gracious assurances of endless favour from God

Who, are we told, are already set down in the kingdom of Heaven, where we shall join, if we imitate them?

MARY. Is it not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

MAMA. Just so. The Patriarchs, for whose sake God first chose, and will finally restore Israel.

Lay to heart this day's lesson, my dear child. Remember the bad consequences, temporal and spiritual, of presumption, and let them teach you docility and submission to your superiors in age and judgment. When you see that the benefits of good conduct and piety can reach so far and wide,—and the consequences of impiety and disobedience affect whole generations, strive more and more to act, so as to bring a blessing on all connected with you. When you see that God could reject his chosen people for their crime of unbelief, tremble to be guilty of it; and, when you read the gracious promise of their restoration, learn to admire and wonder at the unsearchable riches of God's mercy. May God bless these instructions to you, my child! for, without His aid, your mother knows her teaching is in vain!

MORNING SECOND.

LESSON.—1st Kings, from 26th Verse, 12th Chapter, to end of 13th Chapter.

MAMA. Well, Mary! do you now think Jeroboam deserved the promotion it pleased God to give him, or that it was the happier for him?

MARY. Oh! no!

MAMA. Why did he not deserve it?

MARY. Because his very first action was to make the Israelites forsake the God who made him king.

MAMA. Sad apostasy indeed! especially when God had promised, that, if he would serve him faithfully, his posterity should be blessed for ever! But why do you conclude that his exaltation was a misfortune? and was it so to himself only? Remember what we found in the Commandments yesterday.

MARY. Oh! it is here too, Mama! It says, in the last verse of the chapter, that "this thing cut off the house of Jeroboam, and destroyed it from off the face of the earth."

MAMA. What thing, my dear? (*A pause.*) Always think before you speak. What was Jeroboam's capital sin?

MARY. Making two golden calves, Mama, to be worshipped by the people.

MAMA. Why did he do this wicked and foolish thing?

MARY. For fear they should go up to Jerusalem, and so rebel against him.

MAMA. This shewed great distrust of God, who had given, and could surely have kept him his kingdom; but, let me see if you know *why* they would otherwise have gone up to Jerusalem to worship. I do not think you have read the part of the Bible where the Israelites were ordered to go every year at least three times up to Jerusalem on great festivals; but you may remember who, in the gospels, *obeyed* this command of God. (*A pause.*) Oh! Mary! where were the parents of Christ coming from, when he staid behind, and was missing?

MARY. (*Eagerly.*) From Jerusalem, Mama; from the feast.

MAMA. What feast?

MARY. The feast of the Passover.

MAMA. Do you know what that commemorated? You have read Exodus, but not very lately.

MARY. The passing over of the houses of the Israelites, when the first-born of Egypt were killed.

MAMA. Very well, indeed ! How came you to remember this so readily, Mary ?

MARY. Oh ! Mama, I believe because of the pictures in your Bible, of the Israelites eating the lamb, and the sprinkling of the blood on the doors.

MAMA. Well ! you see the use of my shewing you these from your infancy ; but, Mary, I would rather, *far* rather, you knew what this Passover was a figure of, just as much as the picture in my Bible represents what took place in Egypt !

MARY. Do tell me, Mama.

MAMA. Yes, my child ; and may God seal it upon your heart, as well as your memory ! The lamb the Israelites slew was a type or emblem of Christ, slain for sinners ; and his blood sprinkled on their doors, to keep the destroying angel from them,—a gracious foretaste of that “ blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel,” and was shed to keep death and hell from our gates, yea, even to avert the righteous wrath of Jehovah ! Whenever you say the word “ Passover,” think of Christ as bleeding for *your sins*, and dying that you might live. How *foolish* you would have thought any parent to

Egypt, who refused to sprinkle the lamb's blood on his door, and so lost his eldest son! Oh! be not of the number of those whose souls are lost for want of applying a blood more precious still! We will speak more of this when you are older. In the mean time, do you not see how sinful Jeroboam was, both to keep his people from celebrating so great a deliverance, and, instead of it, seducing them to commit idolatry?

MARY. Oh! yes, Mama. I think he was worse than Aaron, who, you know, made a golden calf too.

MAMA. Ay, Mary! And let us hear why.

MARY. Because Aaron did it against his will, to please the people, and believed God in his heart all the time.

MAMA. I am not at all sure, Mary, that this does not enhance his guilt. And then think what advantages he had over Jeroboam, and what opportunities of seeing God's miracles and power so very lately! That a man just fresh from the Red Sea, should make an idol, would puzzle any one who did not know how "deceitful and desperately wicked" the human heart is! Aaron and Jeroboam were both great sinners. I am glad it occurred to yourself to compare them. How was Aaron punished?

MARY. I don't remember.

MAMA. In a way doubly distressing to one who, on the whole, was a good man. "God plagued the people for the sin of Aaron;" and ordered every man to slay his brother in the camp, on account of this great wickedness. How must Aaron's heart have smitten him, when he saw bloodshed and pestilence on every side, and the tables of God's law broken in pieces, and all occasioned by his weak compliance with a rebellious multitude! But let us return to Jeroboam. How was he punished?

MARY. Mama, he was offering sacrifice at the altar he had made.....

MAMA. Stop, Mary! Was that his business, even had the altar been to the true God?

MARY. No.

MAMA. Whose then? Whom had God made priests for ever?

MARY. The sons of Aaron. I remember their fine dresses in the picture Bible.

MAMA. So you see Jeroboam was determined to make priests as well as gods: indeed he might well do the one after venturing on the other!—Who interrupted him in his impious career?

MARY. "A man of God from Bethel."

MAMA. What does a man of God in the Old Testament generally mean?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. See if you can find it out from what this one did or said.

MARY. He told what would happen long after.

MAMA. Ah! And in whose words?

MARY. "In the word of the Lord."

MAMA. Then what do you call people who foretell future events in the name of the Lord?

(A pause.)

What did Christ say (speaking of John the Baptist), that men went into the wilderness to see?

MARY. "A prophet," Mama.

MAMA. Very well indeed!—A prophet, then, is a man who foretells, by the Spirit of God, what shall come to pass. What did John foretell?

MARY. The coming and office of Christ. We read about it on Sunday.

MAMA. I am very glad you remember. Now, what did the prophet, or man of God, from Bethel, foretell?

MARY. That one named Josiah should burn upon that altar the bones of the very priests who were now sacrificing there.

MAMA. How did the wicked king receive this terrible prophecy?

MARY. He put out his hand to lay hold on the

prophet, but it withered, and he could not pull it in again.

MAMA. Indeed!—One would have thought this enough to make him give up idolatry! Did his hand remain withered?

MARY. No. The good prophet prayed for him, and it was restored.

MAMA. Who prayed for his very murderers, Mary?

MARY. Our blessed Lord, Mama. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

MAMA. Very right. Did this kindness of the prophet, and marvellous goodness of the Lord, not touch Jeroboam's heart.

MARY. Yes, Mama. He asked home the man of God, and offered him a reward; though it says "he refrained not from his evil way after all he had seen."

MAMA. Did the prophet accept the idolatrous king's hospitality or gifts?

MARY. Oh, no!—God had charged him to eat or drink with no man, and he at first refused to do so, though the king would "give him half his house."

MAMA. *At first*, you say Mary. Did any other prophet whom you remember, at first say the same, when pressed to do wickedly? (A pause.)

And afterwards comply, though a miracle was wrought to teach him his danger?

MARY. Oh yes, Mama!—Now I know you mean Balaam. He would not go, *at first*, either with the messengers, “though Balak would give him his house full of gold.”

MAMA. Well! Mary, all the world knows his end was deplorable. What befell the less wicked, but still guilty man of God here?

MARY. He let himself be over-persuaded by a lying prophet; and, for staying to eat and drink, when God had forbid him, was torn in pieces by a lion.

MAMA. A sad fate indeed, Mary!—And a fresh proof that there is more and deeper sin in mere unbelief, or preferring human counsel to that of God, than we at first perceive. I dare say you thought the prophet hardly dealt with just now; but God sees not as we see; and probably knew that his heart, like Balaam’s, was not right, though his lips had involuntarily uttered the words of inspiration.

What shall we gather from this morning’s lesson? That prosperity often hardens and corrupts the heart, as it did Jeroboam’s, and is no sure mark of God’s favour. That no gifts, however *eminent, like this prophet’s*, will excuse disobedience and self-confidence. That, since Aaro

sinned as fatally and disgracefully as Jeroboam, no child of Adam need presume on his privileges, and that we should all humbly pray to be kept from temptation. When any one would persuade you to depart from the express command of God, think of the prophet of Bethel and the lion!

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MORNING THIRD.

LESSON.—1st Kings, 14th Chapter to the end.

MAMA. My dear Mary, are you not shocked with all the terrible judgments which, in this chapter, we already hear denounced against Jeroboam and his rebellious Israelites? and, still more, with the idolatry and wickedness of Judah, under Rehoboam, the son of wise Solomon, and grandson of God-fearing David? The former seemed wonderful and inexcusable enough to us; but, that the favoured tribe whom God retained “to be a light before his servant David for ever, in the city which he had chosen to put his name there,” should so shamefully provoke and forsake him, almost exceeds belief! What must that forbearance and long-suffering be, which could for a moment endure such rebels and apostates on the earth! But, let us see what temporal distress first overtook Jeroboam in his guilty career.

MARY. Mama, his son fell sick.

MAMA. *Is this an uncommon chastisement to*

unthinking or profligate parents, Mary ? Do you remember any one else, who, to use the expressive language of Scripture, “gave the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul ?” (*A pause.*) Do you not remember wondering at a father, who refused to be comforted while his babe yet lived ; and yet when all was over, took food and became cheerful ?

MARY. Oh ! yes, you mean David, when Bathsheba’s child died.

MAMA. I told you that his conduct, though unusual, was not unnatural ; for that, when hope was over, he saw the hand of the Lord in it, and grew resigned. But are we always, or even often, justified in seeing the wrath of God in the removal of children or friends ?

MARY. I suppose not, Mama ; for I am sure excellent people often lose both.

MAMA. True, Mary ; and to these such trials are fatherly chastisements. Why, then, do we say, without hesitation, that the death of David’s child, and the sickness of Jeroboam’s, were judgments ?

MARY. Because both fathers had just been very, very wicked.

MAMA. Right. We read here, Mary, of Jeroboam sending his wife in disguise to ask advice

of the prophet Ahijah. Do you remember what I told you of a prophet?

MARY. Yes, Mama; he is a man whom God enables to tell what will happen.

MAMA. Very well. Now, why did Jeroboam think Ahijah, in particular, could help him?

MARY. Oh! because, you know, it was Ahijah who first told him he would be king, by tearing his clothes in twelve pieces.

MAMA. Very well remembered.

MARY. Mama, why did the child's mother take with her "ten loaves, and cracknels, and honey?" Could God not give the prophet all he wanted?

MAMA. Yes, my dear, and he doubtless did so: but no one in those days went to ask a favour, especially of a superior, without carrying a present. It was a customary civility and mark of respect. Do you recollect what Abigail took to make up for her husband's brutal rudeness?

MARY. I don't remember exactly; but I know it was a great quantity of bread and meat, besides figs and raisins.

MAMA. Don't you recollect one thing that amused us both at the time? You wondered there were only two bottles of wine to five sheep, and two hundred loaves of bread.

MARY. Oh! yes, Mama, so I did.

MAMA. How did I explain it, Mary?

MARY. You told me the bottles of the Jews were large skins of animals, holding as much as a barrel at a time, and not little bottles like ours.

MAMA. And what passage of the New Testament did this make clearer ?

MARY. Where it is said new wine must be put into new bottles, else they will burst, which you know, Mama, glass would not do.

MAMA. Very well, Mary. You see how one part of Scripture throws light upon another, even in such trifles as these. Make it your study to compare equally "spiritual things with spiritual," and you will find the result the same.—To return to the wife of Jeroboam. Did her errand prosper ?

MARY. Oh ! no, Mama. The old blind prophet knew her at once ; for God had told him she was coming ; and he said, " Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings."

MAMA. Did this mean only that her child would die ?

MARY. No, Mama ; that was the least of it,—what followed is shocking.

MAMA. What was to happen to Jeroboam and his family ?

MARY. Oh ! some were to be eaten by dogs, and some by the fowls of the air, and all were to

be utterly cut off and taken away, "as a man taketh away dung."

MAMA. Shocking, indeed, Mary! and yet sure to come to pass, for what does the prophet end his threats with?

MARY. "Because the Lord hath spoken it."

MAMA. Very well. Be sure you remember these frightful particulars when you come to read of their fulfilment in this sinful and fated family. Was the child to live?

MARY. No: but it alone of them all was to be decently buried, "because, in *him*, there was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel."

MAMA. A glorious distinction! What should such as you learn from this, Mary?

MARY. (*After thinking.*) I suppose that even children may fear and please God.

MAMA. Very well indeed! There is even reason to believe, my dear, that *early* piety is singularly pleasing in his sight. Do you know any child who was dedicated from infancy to God, and favoured with Divine revelations even in his childhood? (*A pause.*) Whose mother made him a coat every year, and took it up when she went to Shiloh?

MARY. Oh! Mama, Samuel's; dear little Samuel's: "he ministered before the Lord in a linen ephod."

MAMA. He was indeed a child of hope and promise, Mary, and blessed accordingly. But can you tell me one who was so far more especially still, and whose mother, far above even pious Hannah, was "blessed among women?" (*A silence.*) Mary, I mean the child Jesus, who "grew in favour with God and man," who taught in the temple at twelve years old, and yet was "subject to his parents," and "fulfilled the whole law." Take *Him* for your pattern, my beloved child, and God will bless you, and make you liker and liker still to your bright example! As for Jeroboam's child, it was probably in mercy that it was taken from such wicked parents, and removed to heaven. But let us look for a moment at Rehoboam. Was he made wiser or better by the loss of four-fifths of his kingdom?

MARY. Oh! dear no! He was a sad idolater, and his people "provoked God above all that their fathers had done."

MAMA. Can you find any shadow of excuse for Rehoboam? I thought I traced one as you read the chapter. Who was his mother?

MARY. Naamah, Mama, an "Ammonitess."

MAMA. Ah! you see what I mean. She was a heathen, and probably brought up her son in her own ways. My dear Mary! never forget to thank God for Christian parents, and the oppor-

tunities at least of Christian instruction. How many wretched prodigals both in Scripture and our own days, have traced their eternal ruin to careless or irreligious mothers ! How many reclaimed sinners, again, or eminent saints, have, with dying breath, blessed the lips that early taught them to fear and pray to God ! Let me have the comfort, my love, to hear you thank me in heaven for these very hours that are so pleasant to us on earth. When you see how weak unassisted human nature can be, Oh ! remember I told you where grace can alone be found. Seek it early, seek it incessantly, my dear child, and believe a greater than your mother, " you will never seek in vain !"

MORNING FOURTH.

LESSON.—1st Kings, 15th Chapter to 25th verse.

MARY. Oh! Mama, what a shocking account of kings, every one worse and more wicked than another! I am quite sick of reading about them.

MAMA. So are many people, older and wiser than yourself, Mary, and therefore their history is often passed over as unprofitable. But let us see if we cannot extract from it both instruction and edification. Suppose we leave the wicked kings, both of Israel and Judah, for a while, to reap the fruit of their crimes, and turn to the little sunny spot afforded us amid prevailing darkness, by the obedience and piety of faithful Asa. Who was he, my dear?

MARY. A king of Judah, Mama; not next after Rehoboam, but his grandson.

MAMA. Why does he appear to have been better and more prosperous than his father?

MARY. For the sake of David, Mama: it is said, "God still gave him a lamp in Jerusalem."

MAMA. A further proof of the influence on



generations unborn, of the fear of the Lord! How did Asa shew himself worthy of God's favour?

MARY. He removed all the idols his father had made, and he removed his very mother from being queen, because she had made an idol.

MAMA. Stop, Mary! We have unhappily been hearing too much lately of idols and idolatry. I am not sure if you know exactly what an idol is.

MARY. (*Confidently.*) Oh, Mama, an idol is an idol. I really don't know any other word for it.

MAMA. I hope it is rather a word than an idea you are at a loss for, so I will help you to one. What does the second commandment forbid us to make or bow down to?

MARY. "Graven images," Mama.

MAMA. And how does it further describe them?

MARY. "Or the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth."

MAMA. Well then, an idol is a likeness of any created thing, made for the purpose of being worshipped. But let us examine the matter more closely. What is a *graven* image?

MARY. I don't know, Mama.

MAMA. It is a figure of wood or stone, or any

material capable of being cut with a tool or chisel. You have seen a graven image.

MARY. Me, Mama? You are joking!

MAMA. Don't you remember, when you went with me to see Lord S——'s fine place, the large marble figures of heathen gods and goddesses?

MARY. Oh, Mama! Those were beautiful statues! Idols are ugly things!

MAMA. Not always, Mary. Those beautiful statues, as you call them, were, to all intents and purposes, idols, as they represented to the elegant Greeks the objects of their idolatrous worship. But I know why you suppose idols necessarily ugly. You are thinking of the hideous Burnese images your uncle brought home from India.

MARY. Oh yes, Mama! I am sure these were disgusting and ugly enough!

MAMA. And yet, you see, not too ugly and vile to be adored by that depraved heart of man which can forsake the Creator of the universe, and worship reptiles and creeping things! But *à propos* of these very Indian idols,—they belong to a class of which we also read in Scripture, viz. *molten* images.

MARY. I never read of any, Mama.

MAMA. Don't be too sure. How was the golden calf at Horeb made? (*A pause.*) What *did* Aaron borrow to make it?

MARY. Oh! the women's gold ear-rings! I remember thinking what an immense number it would take to make a thing the size of a calf.

MAMA. That proceeded from your ignorance. Were the Burmese idols you saw as large as life?

MARY. Oh no, Mama, quite little.

MAMA. Neither probably was Aaron's: but, after he got the ear-rings, could he *cut* them into the shape of a calf, and make it a *graven* image?

MARY. No.

MAMA. How, then, do you suppose he did?

MARY. I suppose he must have melted the gold, as I saw them do once at the Mint.

MAMA. Very right! and then, to use a very homely illustration, it was poured into a mould, as you have seen jelly, and came out the shape required; that is, a *molten* image; and such are the little silver monster-gods of the Burmese. Do you remember what was the end of Aaron's calf? it was as strange as its beginning.

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. Moses was determined no trace of it should remain, so he stamped it to powder, and strewed it on the waters, and made the sinful Israelites drink them. What did good Asa do to his mother's idol, with the same intention?

MARY. He burnt it, Mama.

MAMA. Then it was probably a graven image of wood. But we have not yet done with idolatry. Where did Asa's mother put her idol, when she had made it?

MARY. In a grove, Mama.

MAMA. Now, Mary, we read often in Scripture of the worshipping in groves, and always as particularly odious and displeasing to God. Why so? Was there any thing in the quiet retirement of a wood unfavourable to devotion?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. No, certainly; else our Saviour would not have retired to the olive-grove, to spend the night in prayer. But, unfortunately, the darkness of woods was more favourable still, in heathen times, to deeds of cruelty and bloodshed. The rites practised there were always of the most barbarous kind; and the Druidical worship (one of the oldest in the world, and the one which, but for Christ, you and I, Mary, would probably have been slaves to, as it prevailed in Britain), sacrificed yearly a great number of human victims.

MARY. What is a victim, Mama?

MAMA. You are very right, Mary, always to stop me when I use a word above your capacity. A victim is any animal or person slain with the idea of pleasing or appeasing God.

MARY. Oh! Mama, the true God could never

be pleased with either men or animals being killed !

MAMA. We have his own authority for the contrary, Mary : have you forgotten the Pascal Lamb already ? But, besides the oxen and sheep, which, for wise reasons, and as shadows of a purer sacrifice, He was pleased to accept, do you remember no case in which God expressly demanded a human victim ?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. Were you never sorry for any one laid bound upon an altar by his own father, whose very knife was raised to kill him ?

MARY. Oh ! yes ; poor Isaac and good old Abraham ! but you know God did not let him be killed.

MAMA. Very true. In his case it was but a trial of faith, and an illustrious type of Christ. Hard as the trial was, Abraham must have been thankful it had been imposed.

MARY. Why, Mama ?

MAMA. Mary, Who does Christ tell us “ saw his day and was glad ? ” (*A pause.*) Was it not Abraham ?

MARY. Oh ! yes.

MAMA. Then, as we nowhere read that Abraham was a prophet, the Salvation of Christ was probably explained to him at this very time, as a

reward for his cheerful obedience. But, what victim did God, after all, provide? for even before both law and gospel, without shedding of blood there was no remission.

MARY. A ram, Mama. I have seen it caught by the horns, and struggling to get loose.

MAMA. Well, Mary, this also was a figure that God would condescend to accept animal sacrifices, till Christ should abolish them for ever by "the sacrifice of himself." The subject of types is rather difficult for you yet; but you see what a deal of useful knowledge we have managed to get from two verses of the history of Asa. Let us learn further from it how highly God values *sincerity in religion*. David and Asa are both called *perfect* for that very quality. Let us also draw thankfulness, that the stumbling-block of idolatry is removed from among us; but never forget that we may cherish idols in our heart, as dangerous as the beautiful statues of Greece, and as ugly as the shapeless monsters of India!

MORNING FIFTH.

LESSON.—1st Kings, from 25th verse of Chapter xv. to 29th of Chap. xvi.

MAMA. We are now, my dear Mary, come to the fulfilment of the terrible denunciations against Jeroboam and his family, by the prophet of Bethel. In whose time were they executed?

MARY. In Nadab, his son's, Mama; "who did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin, wherewith he made Israel to sin."

MAMA. Take particular notice of this last expression, Mary: it is not repeated so continually throughout this book, without an awful meaning. Why is Jeroboam held up as so peculiarly an object of God's displeasure?

MARY. Because he "made Israel to sin."

MAMA. So you see that those who, by their evil example, lead others into iniquity, have a double and fearful account to render. We, in private life, Mary, cannot cause whole nations or communities to go astray; but, whoever wilfully,

or even thoughtlessly, induces a servant of God to "break one of his least commands," is a partaker in the guilt of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, "who made Israel to sin,"—an expression of reproach which has accompanied his name to this present hour, and will go down with it to the end of the world! Who was made the instrument of God's vengeance?

MARY. Baasha.

MAMA. And how did he execute it?

MARY. He conspired against Nadab.

MAMA. Do you understand what conspiring means?

MARY. Not exactly, Mama; I only know he killed him.

MAMA. That he might have done alone: most murders are committed by one person; but a conspiracy requires several to agree in it. And what was Baasha's first act on becoming king?

MARY. "He left not unto Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the Lord, because of the provocation wherewith they provoked the Lord God of Israel."

MAMA. You have here an awful instance of a father's sins "visited on the third and fourth generation," as you lately had a gracious one of the mercy "kept for thousands" in Israel, for the

sake of David. Did Baasha fear God, who had raised him up as "the rod of his anger?"

MARY. Oh! no. He did just the same as Jeroboam, Mama. I wonder, when God wanted to cut off wicked kings, why he did not choose good ones to do it, instead of others as bad, or worse than themselves.

MARY. Your question, my dear, though not an unnatural one, may almost be its own answer. Good men, or such as we are in the habit of calling so, would be quite unfit for the work of extermination, unless God were to change and overrule their natural characters; whereas the passions of wicked men serve his inscrutable purposes, by being merely left to their own unchecked operation. I will give you an instance. David (who, imperfect as we have seen his goodness to be, was yet, on the whole, an upright and amiable man), though aware, for twenty years, that God had anointed him to be king in place of Saul, never once dreamt of hastening the time by taking that wicked monarch's life; but, on the contrary, when it was in his power, repeatedly spared it, and seemed almost ashamed of defending his own against him. Now, suppose God, instead of meaning to try David all this long time, and punish Saul, in this life, by the terrors of an evil conscience, had intended to

cut off the latter suddenly, with all his house, (including the amiable and innocent Jonathan), it is plain he would have chosen a very different servant from David to perform it,—one like the Baashas and Zimris, and others we read of in this melancholy chapter,—the last I hope we shall have, full of murders and conspiracies. There is no part of either Scripture or modern history more wonderful, than the use Providence makes of wicked men, or the marvellous manner in which, when their purpose is served, they are “broken without hand,” like a rod that is done with; though, but for the plain manner in which this is exemplified in the Bible, we might never have understood what passes daily under our own eyes. We must never for a moment suppose, however, that their being unconscious doers of God’s “strange work” at all lightens the sin of traitors and murderers. What does it say was one reason of God’s righteous punishment of Baasha, besides his being “like unto Nadab, the son of Jeroboam?”

MARY. Mama, “Because he killed him.”

MAMA. Very well. Remember *we* are “not to do ~~and~~ that good may come,” and that God has said “Vengeance is mine, I will repay;” even while letting bad men be his guilty executioners. Sometimes, Mary, ~~he makes~~ the sins of those ~~he~~ means to punish, the chief agents in their destruc-

tion. See if you can tell me whose case this was among the kings slain in this chapter.

MARY. (*After looking it over.*) Mama, I suppose you mean Elah, the son of Baasha, who was killed when he was "drinking himself drunk" in the house of his steward.

MAMA. Very right. This was disgraceful conduct in any one, and still more in a king, who is bound to set a good example. Did Zimri, who took advantage of it, long enjoy the fruits of his treachery?

MARY. No, Mama, he only reigned seven days, when some one else conspired against him.

MAMA. Ah! you see already that the prosperity of the wicked is as short-lived as it is deceitful! What dreadful end did Zimri come to?

MARY. He shut himself up in the king's house, and set fire to it.

MAMA. How hard pressed he must have been to choose so cruel a death! Fear and conscience must have been terribly at work here! What remarkable thing is mentioned as done by Omri his successor?

MARY. He bought the hill Samaria of Shemer, for two talents of silver, and built a city on it, called after its owner, Samaria.

MAMA. Do you know, Mary, how much a talent of silver is?

MARY. No.

MAMA. It is about £350. For how many pieces of silver did Judas sell his master? I think you know that.

MARY. Thirty, Mama.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, or about £3, 10s. 6d. of our money; does not this shock you when you think of it? Did I ever explain to you any thing else that seemed puzzling about the money of the Jews? (*A pause.*) Who did you once think very shabby, for only leaving twopence behind him?

MARY. Oh! the good Samaritan;—but you told me a Roman penny was more than sevenpence, and that two such pence then, would be worth many shillings now.

MAMA. What other parable did this explanation make clearer?

MARY. The labourers in the vineyard, Mama. Working all day for a penny seemed very hard, till you told me how much it was.

MAMA. Very right, Mary! It would not be amiss if this were cleared up in all our Bibles, as it is apt to puzzle ignorant people, and give rise to profane scoffing. Before leaving the subject,

what miracle connected with money did our Lord once perform? the only one, remember, he ever did for his own benefit, and even then he shared it with another as poor as himself.

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Think; did our Lord say it was right to pay taxes?

MARY. Oh! yes, Mama; he said, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

MAMA. And was he always able to do this; he who, though Lord of all, "had not where to lay his head?"

MARY. No Mama, I remember now, he made Peter catch a fish, and told him there would be a penny in its mouth, to pay for them both.

MAMA. A wonderful miracle, truly, Mary! and one requiring as great a combination of divine power, as feeding 5000 men with two fishes! But, to return to Samaria; do you know what it became?

MARY. No.

MAMA. The capital city of the kingdom of Israel, as long as that lasted. But we read of it again in our Lord's time, when there was no kingdom of Israel, the Ten Tribes having been long dispersed. Who lived there then?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. A mongrel sort of people, half Jews,

half descendants of heathen settlers in Judea. Were the Jews and they on good terms?

MARY. Oh! no, Mama.

MAMA. How do you know?

MARY. Oh! because the woman of Samaria wondered our Lord should even ask her for a drink of water; and once he was near killed because "his face was as if he was going to Samaria."

MAMA. Very well remembered. Indeed the Evangelists tell us expressly that the "Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans."

MARY. I wonder why, Mama.

MAMA. Because of mutual jealousies about their rival temples; and the Samaritans only acknowledging the five books of Moses to be Scripture. But, Mary, what had they learned even from *these*, more than the Jews, who had the prophets also to enlighten them?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Do you remember what the woman of Samaria said Christ would do when he came?

MARY. No.

MAMA. I will tell you. She and her people expected him to be a *Teacher*, while the proud worldly Jews only looked for an earthly Conqueror; and when Christ disappointed them, put him to death. Let this teach you the blessedness

of those who humbly make the most of small opportunities of instruction, over prejudiced and self-confident persons who are too proud to learn !

We have had a melancholy task to-day, Mary, but a necessary one, in following the wickedness of man to its utmost height, in the kings of rebellious Israel. Let us not lose sight of its deplorable consequence the total loss and dispersion of the Ten Tribes, who have not been heard of for more than two thousand years ; while the relics of the “ afflicted seed of David ” are kept, by a miracle, unmixed among the nations of the earth, till the time (which cannot now be far distant) fixed in the counsels of God for their restoration.

MORNING SIXTH.

LESSON.—1st Kings, Chapter xvi., Verse 29, to end of Chapter xvii.

MAMA. I fear, Mary, we are not yet done with wicked kings, as Ahab, whose reign we are beginning to-day, excelled all his predecessors in iniquity. But then his history is relieved with a number of interesting stories; and the bright character of the prophet Elijah cheers our hearts all the while, like a light shining in a dark place! Who was Ahab, my dear?

MARY. The son of Omri, King of Israel.

MAMA. And what was his character?

MARY. Oh, Mama, dreadful!—"As if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam," he took a heathen wife, called Jezebel, and worshipped her god, Baal!

MAMA. Dreadful indeed! Do you remember any similar marriages where precisely the same thing happened? But indeed I scarcely think you have read the part of Scripture where it is recorded. It occurs in Numbers: "The Israelites

joined themselves to the daughters of Moab, and served Baal-peor ;” and immediately (as in the case of the golden calf) bloodshed and pestilence were the consequence of their transgression. Phinehas and his faithful comrades slew the offenders, and four and twenty thousand people died of the plague ! Oh ! Mary, is it not wonderful that fools should, after such dreadful judgments, “ make a mock at sin ? ” Do they suppose God is less angry with it now, because he no longer punishes it so signally on the spot ? Let us be wiser, and remember the Israelites in the wilderness ! Was Ahab content with Baal and the golden calves for gods ?

MARY. No, Mama ; he made a grove, and “ provoked God above all the kings that had gone before him.”

MAMA. What reason have we to think, from the very next verse, that unbelief and impiety are infectious ? Who followed Ahab’s bad example of both ?

MARY. I am sure I don’t know, Mama, unless you mean “ Hiel the Bethelite,” who built up Jericho. What was there sinful in that ?

MAMA. Something, surely, Mary, else it would not have been marked by such signal judgments. What does it mean that “ he laid the foundation

thereof in Abiram, his first-born, and set up the gates in his youngest son Segub?"

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. It means that he lost both his sons in consequence of daringly venturing to rebuild a city which God meant to destroy for ever. Who had prophesied that he would do so?

MARY. Joshua, the son of Nun.

MAMA. And was he good authority? Do you know who he was?

MARY. Yes, Mama; he was a young man, on whom Moses leaned when he was old. I have seen a picture of it.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; but he was more. He was his worthy and valiant successor; and some consider him as a type of Christ, both because of his name, (which is the same as Jesus,) and because he brought Israel into the promised land, which Moses, the great head of the law, was not permitted to do. Do you recollect why poor Moses lost this great privilege?

MARY. For disobeying God, I believe.

MAMA. No, Mary, not exactly; but for *performing God's command in a way of his own!* Oh! Mary, beware of self-sufficiency and departure from the simplicity of the Gospel, when you see that the great lawgiver of Israel was not excused for taking "one jot or tittle" from the re-

vealed will of God ! Many seek even their religion from " broken cisterns " of their own, not remembering that Moses lost Canaan, for bringing water from the rock, by striking, instead of speaking to it ! While on the subject of Jericho, Do you recollect how it was destroyed ?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. I will tell you. Lest the Israelites should imagine that their own might and valour had taken all the cities of Canaan, when they came to this last and strongest one, on the very borders of the promised land, God commanded their soldiers to stand still, and see what the Lord would do. He then ordered the priests to go seven times round the city, blowing with trumpets, and, at the seventh blast, the walls fell flat down, and every man walked straight before him into the city. . Surely this was a conquest worthy to be had in remembrance ! and God no doubt intended Jericho to remain a ruined monument to his glory to the latest posterity. Hiel chose to disregard the threatening of the Lord, and the lives of his sons paid for his bold impiety. But, let us hasten to the next chapter, to be introduced to Elijah. Who was he, my dear ?

MARY. " A Tishbite," Mama ; " of the inhabitants of Gilead."

MAMA. What was his first public act ?

MARY. He went to King Ahab, and said, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

MAMA. Bold language, indeed, Mary! What did this prove Elijah to be?

MARY. A prophet, Mama, I suppose.

MAMA. "Yea, and more than a prophet," I think, Mary; for few of them enjoyed power over the elements, however they might foretell the future. Why did God immediately bid him conceal himself?

MARY. For fear Ahab should kill him.

MAMA. My dear, that was beyond his power, unless God allowed him; but he might have suffered grievous persecutions from him, to procure rain, which God was determined for three years to withhold from rebellious Israel. Where did Elijah hide himself at the Lord's command?

MARY. "By the brook Cherith," Mama, and the ravens fed him.

MAMA. Who feeds *them*, Mary? who "giveth the young ravens their meat in due season?"

MARY. It is God, Mama; and it was He who taught them to bring bread and flesh to Elijah.

MAMA. Was any one else you remember, miraculously fed in the wilderness? (*A pause.*)

Who spent forty days there, Mary, and "was afterwards an hungered?"

MARY. Our blessed Lord.

MAMA. And what happened at the end of that time?

MARY. "Angels came and ministered to him."

MAMA. Very well! You see God can make every creature, from the fowls of the air to the loftiest angel, "minister unto them that are the heirs of his promise:" What drove Elijah from his retreat?

MARY. The brook dried up, and he could no longer drink.

MAMA. Where did God send him then?

MARY. To a city called Zarephath, where a "widow woman was commanded to sustain him."

MAMA. Why did God send the prophet to this poor woman, who was starving herself, when there were surely rich people in the place?

MAMA. To shew forth his own glory, Mary, as he does many things; and that Elijah's maintenance in the city might be as miraculous as his sustenance in the desert! But you might have wondered at something else. Do you know where Zarephath was?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. It was no part of Judea, but a city of

Sidon,—the very country of wicked Queen Jezebel; as if God had wished to shew that he had faithful servants everywhere, and was “no respecter of persons.” Do you recollect how remarkably our Saviour applies this very circumstance, when rebuking his own countrymen for their unbelief, in spite of all their advantages? “I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel, in the days of Elias the Prophet, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and when great famine was throughout the land; but unto none of these was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman who was a widow.” Pray, Mary, is there any other woman of Sidon, whose remarkable history in the Gospel shews that there are persons “in every kingdom and nation,” who, if they believe, are “accepted of God?”

MARY. I don't know, Mama.

MAMA. Who carried humility so far, my dear, as to liken herself, and her people, to “dogs picking up crumbs under their master's table?”

MARY. Oh! Mama, the woman of Canaan, whose daughter Christ cured, ~~because~~ she asked him so often.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, for faith, perseverance, and humility. Well! she came out of these very

"coasts of Tyre and Sidon," and, though a Greek or Syrophenician, and, consequently, a heathen, believed in Christ," and it was "counted to her for righteousness." What was the widow of Zarephath doing when Elijah met her?

MARY. Gathering sticks, Mama; and he asked her for a drink of water, which she gave him, and then for a bit of bread; but she told him she had not a morsel, only a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse..... What is a cruse, Mama?.....

MAMA. A stone pitcher, my dear.

MARY.And that the sticks she was gathering were to dress it for herself and her son, "that they might eat and die."

MAMA. A sad situation, indeed! And did Elijah still venture to ask her for part of her pittance?

MARY. Yes, Mama, and the first share too, and she gave it to him.

MAMA. That was carrying charity very far.

MARY. But then the prophet had told her the meal and oil should last till the rain came.

MAMA. Ah! then, it is a sister-grace we must admire, as well as charity,—they are seldom far asunder! It was the widow's *faith* which made her obey Elijah. Was this faith rewarded?

MARY. Yes; the meal and oil never ran out, and they were well off all the time of the famine.

MAMA. Was this all the good effect of her faith and charity?

MARY. Oh! no; her son fell sick and died, and Elijah restored him to life. You told me this story when I was quite a baby.

MAMA. It is one so simple and affecting, my dear, that it is adapted alike for young and old. But we must try and draw a Christian moral from it; and two things strike me as remarkable. What was the immediate effect produced even on this worthy widow by her son's sickness and death? What did she think it was sent for?

MARY. She thought it came "to call her sins to remembrance."

MAMA. Here you have the gracious purpose of all such trials to God's servants. Without sin there would have been neither death nor sickness in the world, and both should ever remind us of it. Such being the wholesome effects of affliction on this mother, what were the still more precious fruits of joy for her son's revival?

MARY. She said unto Elijah, "Now I know by this, that the word of God in thy mouth is truth."

MAMA. So she became a believer in the true God. She owed to her acquaintance with the prophet the two inestimable blessings of repentance and conversion. Remember, Mary, they were both equally necessary, and can never be separated.

MORNING SEVENTH.

LESSON.—1st Kings, Chapter xviii. to the end.

MAMA. My dear Mary, I don't know if you are exactly aware to how deplorable a condition Ahab and his kingdom were by this time reduced, by the three years' drought foretold by Elijah. Things are sometimes parched up enough by a few weeks of dry weather, even in our cool moist climate ; but a three years' want of rain or dew, in an arid stony country like Judea, must have been frightful ; and under a sun, too, ten times hotter than ours ! There is a terrible prophecy of Moses before his death, which surely relates to this bitter visitation. He says, in Deuteronomy, when enumerating the curses which should befall Israel on forsaking God,—“ And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron ; the Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust.” A horrible picture of parching desolation any where, but much more so in a dry country,—a “ *thirsty land*,” as Scripture elsewhere calls it.

How was Ahab employed, when Elijah went to him to announce welcome rain?

MARY. He was going one way through the land, and Obadiah another, to see if they could find any blades of grass still remaining by the brooks, to keep the horses and mules alive."

MAMA. What extremities for a king, and the governor of his household, to be reduced to! Which did Elijah meet first?

MARY. Obadiah, Mama.

MAMA. What sort of a person was he?

MARY. It says, "He feared the Lord greatly."

MAMA. A rare virtue at this time in Israel! How long had he feared him?—(*A pause.*)—What did we say the other day of *early* piety, and its blessed effects?

MARY. Mama, he "had feared him from his youth."

MAMA. How did he shew this fear?

MARY. By hiding a hundred prophets of the Lord in a cave, and feeding them with bread and water.

MAMA. Scarce commodities both, you will recollect, at this time of utter starvation! From whom, my dear, was he hiding them?

MARY. From Jezebel, who had cut off the rest of their brethren.

MAMA. Do we hear of any special reward for his loyalty to God in such evil times?

MARY. I don't know of any.

MAMA. Unless we consider his promotion in the king's household as from God. Do you recollect any other eminent person in Scripture, who filled the same high office under a heathen king, by God's express appointment?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. What! not Joseph? who was made "ruler over the house of Pharaoh?" and, for the very same gracious purpose, that he might feed the people of God in a time of distress. Where does Obadiah say Ahab had sent to seek Elijah?

MARY. "Into every nation and kingdom" of the world, Mama, to kill him, I suppose.

MAMA. Then, Mary, we may compare him also to Pharaoh, whose heart God's chastisements only hardened. And yet you see with what godly boldness the prophet set out to face the king, and bitterly rebuked him besides for his idolatry. All who have reason to dread persecution for the Gospel, should think on and imitate Elijah's holy confidence.

Now, Mary, we come to the remarkable trial which the prophet proposed to the people, to ascertain which was the true God, Baal or Jeho-

vah. Whom did he make Ahab gather together on Baal's part ?

MARY. No less than nine hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and of the groves, who all " ate at Jezebel's table."

MAMA. And how many on the Lord's side, Mary ?

MARY. Only poor Elijah, Mama. He must have felt very forlorn !

MAMA. No, my dear; he knew, like every true servant of God, that " there were more with him than they that were against him." Well ! What was done by the two parties ?

MARY. Both took oxen, Mama, " and cut them, and laid them on wood, but put no fire under : " Both were to call on their gods, and the God that answered by fire was to be the true one.

MAMA. There could be little doubt about that, Mary ! But why was fire necessary to sacrifice ?

MARY. I don't know ; I was just thinking.

MAMA. The remains of the animals slain (after the share the priests lived upon,) was ordered to be burnt, and in the temple of Jerusalem, holy fire (which first came down from heaven) was always kept up for the purpose. Who had the first trial allowed them, Mary ?

MARY. The prophets of Baal, Mama ; " because they were many."

MAMA. And did their numbers do them any good ?

MARY. No ; they called upon Baal all day long in vain, “ but there was no voice, nor any that answered or regarded.”

MAMA. What inhuman rites did they practise to propitiate their deaf and dumb idol ?

MARY. Oh ! Mama, the foolish creatures “ cut themselves with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.”

MAMA. How did Elijah regard their mad behaviour ?

MARY. Mama, he made a fool of them, and bade them call loud, for perhaps their God was asleep, or on a journey !

MAMA. Oh ! my dear child, when inclined to be proud or vain of any natural endowments, think of poor human nature, and of millions of our deluded fellow-creatures, still bowing down to stocks and stones ; and not only cutting and torturing their flesh, just like these senseless priests of Baal, but laying their very bodies down, to be crushed by the waggon containing their wooden god !

MARY. Oh ! Mama ; where are such things done now ?

MAMA. Just in India, my dear ; in the midst of our own friends and relations, and in honour of just such despicable gods as the little

Burmese monsters we were talking of the other day. I fear these things being so, proceeds from something in ourselves, not unlike what Elijah reproached the Israelites with. What was it? "How long halt ye between two opinions?" A dangerous state, Mary, for any nation or individual to be in! Not that we have any doubt whether our God or the Baal of India is the true one, but that we can be content to let both divide the world, instead of feeling, like Elijah, that ours is a "jealous God," and one who "will not give his glory to another." Our blessed Master does not command us to kill and utterly destroy all the misguided people who still ignorantly affront and degrade him; but He has bid us "Let our light so shine before men, that they may glorify our Father which is in heaven;" and such, I fear, has not hitherto been the nature of our example in benighted India!—But to return to Elijah. What did *he* do when his turn came?

MARY. He made all the people come near, Mama; and then he repaired the Altar of God that was broken down, and he made a great trench about it. What is a trench?

MAMA. A wide ditch, Mary; such as you often see in meadows.

MARY. Mama, why did he make the people

pour all that water over the bullock, and the wood that was under it?

MAMA. Don't you perceive the reason? For fear they should suspect him of kindling the fire by natural means, which in this soaking state of things was impossible. All this being done, Mary, what more was necessary, before fire from heaven *could* come? What did Elijah do?

MARY. He prayed, Mama, a beautiful prayer to God.

MAMA. Let us learn a deep lesson from this, Mary! We may prepare costly sacrifices, and put the altar of our hearts in order, as Elijah did here; but, without earnest, fervent prayer, depend upon it the vital spark of grace never will descend on our cold and lifeless service. And never let us lose sight of the great ends of Elijah's petition—the glory of God and the conversion of sinners. Did this last effect follow?

MARY. Oh! yes; when the people saw the fire come down, they fell on their faces, and said, "The Lord he is the God, the Lord he is the God!"

MAMA. Oh! that we would do the same, Mary, with more both of sincerity and constancy, when he makes the wonders of his power and love to pass before us! We do not ourselves see fire come down from heaven to consume our offering;

but you may remember the apostles and early disciples, on the day of Pentecost, beheld "as it were cloven tongues of fire descending on them,"—signifying the Holy Spirit of God, that comforter sent by our glorified Lord, whose purifying influences cleanse our hearts from evil thoughts and works, as thoroughly and effectually as Elijah's fire consumed the earthly sacrifice.

We have one lesson more to draw from the chapter, viz. the miserable end of false teachers, and by the very hand of the people they had so long deluded. "They took all the prophets of Baal, and Elijah slew them at the brook Kishon," though they were to him as a thousand to one for numbers, and favoured both by a wicked king and queen; a sure proof that there is no safety in "following a multitude to do evil," and that "though hand join in hand, *iniquity* shall not go unpunished!"

MORNING EIGHTH.

LESSON.—1st Kings, Chapter xix. to the end.

MAMA. My dear Mary, we have in this chapter a striking instance of what we have so often had occasion to remark, viz. the imperfection of the best characters on earth, as well as God's gracious long-suffering in bearing with and excusing them. We see here the famous prophet Elijah, to whom God gave power over the elements, who so lately brought down fire from heaven, and whom we shall ere long behold ascending thither in a chariot of flame, fleeing for his life at the menace of a woman! Not that it is always wrong to withdraw, by lawful means, from unnecessary dangers—Who was it, Mary, “that walked no more openly in Judea for fear of the Jews?”

MARY. Our blessed Lord.

MAMA. Very right. But that was because his life was precious to thousands, and his time for “laying it down” not yet come. However, it is not so much for deserting the post where he had

just been doing so much good (though that was cowardly) that Elijah is blamable, as for desponding of God's power to protect him in it. What a variable creature is man ! Who would believe—that never read the Bible, or looked into his own heart—that the same Elijah who defied a king and court yesterday, and slew nine hundred and fifty priests of idolatry, in the strength of his God, should to-day be “sitting under a juniper tree” in the wilderness, praying to die !

MARY. Mama, why did he pray for this ? I thought people always wished to live.

MAMA. We older pilgrims, Mary, who have “borne the burden and heat of the day,” often feel “weary and faint in our minds,” to a degree which you happy young creatures, to whom life is a pastime, cannot understand. May it be long before sorrow teaches you the lesson ! But this sometimes proceeds from bodily exhaustion and feebleness, and so perhaps it partly was with Elijah, for the first gracious notice God takes of it is to send him strengthening food. Who brought it this time, Mary ?

MARY. An angel, Mama, instead of a raven.

MAMA. God has choice of messengers, my dear, and can send one as easily as another. How often was the miraculous visitation repeated ?

MARY. Three times ; after which he went " in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God."

MAMA. Doubtless by God's command ; else he would not have been supernaturally strengthened for it. Mary ! who else spent forty days and nights fasting on that mountain ?

MARY. Moses, Mama, when he went to get the Tables of the law.

MAMA. Very well. Now, Mary, as the Jewish lawgiver's sojourn there related to the *Law*, I cannot help thinking this visit of Elijah's to the holy mountain (in which he, like Moses, was favoured with a sensible revelation of God's glory), has some allusion, though a dark one, to the gospel dispensation. Do you remember what terrible things accompanied the giving of the Law from Mount Sinai ?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. Suppose we read the passage. We can never be too strongly impressed with the awful solemnity which ushered in that Moral Law contained in the Ten Commandments, " not one jot or tittle of which shall fail, though heaven and earth pass away ;"—and which " Christ came, not to take away, but fulfil." But to save repetition, and, at the same time, to confirm what I have supposed

about the two dispensations, let us read St. Paul's account of the transactions at Sinai, and *his* inspired comment on their difference from Gospel times. It is in Hebrews, 12th chapter and 18th verse. Speaking to *converted* Jews, he says,

“ For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

“ And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more :

“ (For they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned or thrust through with a dart :

“ And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake :)

“ But ye are come to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant,” &c.....All the beautiful and encouraging circumstances of which he goes on to enumerate.

Now, perhaps, (and though a conjecture, it is a harmless one), the delightful mildness and gentleness of the future Covenant might be shadowed out for the consolation of the desponding Elijah, by the remarkable contrast between the two manifestations of Jehovah at Horeb.

.....What does the chapter say of the *second*?

MARY. "And behold a great strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire."

MAMA. Where was he, then, my dear?

MARY. In the "still small voice" that came after all.

MAMA. What leads you to think so?

MARY. Because then "Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle; and went and stood in the mouth of the cave," to hear what God would say.

MAMA. A very good conclusion. My dear, have we ever heard God talk with us face to face, amid thunderings, and lightnings, and tempests, as at Sinai?

MARY. Oh! no; I am sure if we had, we should have died.

MAMA. Nay, Mary; perhaps, like the Israelites, we should have lived to sin next day, and forget it. Was the golden calf made before or after these dreadful tokens of God's power and majesty?

MARY. I don't know,

MAMA. Mary, never forget it was made after, and soon after. But is there any "still small voice" that God speaks in to every one of us?

MARY. God speaks to us now by his ministers, Mama; I have heard you say so.

MAMA. Ministers are but men, Mary, and may err in delivering their Master's message. He has a more faithful witness, who "cannot lie," if we will listen, and not drown his "still small voice" within us. What said so plainly to you this very morning, that I thought I heard it myself, when I saw the blood mount up to your face,—“Mary! you have been idle and inattentive, or you would not have vexed your mother, by saying your catechism so badly?”

MARY. (*In tears.*) Something told me so certainly, Mama. I suppose it was my conscience.

MAMA. Just so, Mary; and that has often, and I believe with truth, been called the voice of God within us. Indeed, St. Paul expressly says, “My conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost.” Attend to it as such, my dear child. Beware how you stifle or pervert it. Remember there is not on this side the grave a state so dreadful or hopeless, as when it ceases to speak at all. It is never drugged into deadly slumber in this world, but to awake in ceaseless upbraidings in the next! But even here, its “still small


voice" may be changed into one of thunder. Did it whisper, think you, to Cain, when he asked in impenitent despair, "Am I my brother's keeper?"—or to the brethren of Joseph, when seeing first their crime in its punishment, they exclaimed, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother!"

MARY. Oh no, Mama; I will pray that it may never speak so to me.

MAMA. God forbid! my dear. But what I have said of conscience, holds equally true of the Gospel. Accepted and listened to, it is all sweetness and love. St. Paul beseeches us "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" to obey him. But "despised and rejected," as he was by the Jews, and many who call themselves Christians,—what so awful as the "wrath of the Lamb?" The thunders of Sinai are as nothing to it, when he shall say, "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire."—But we have forgotten Elijah. What did God tell him, as a further comfort, and at the same time a mild rebuke, for his want of faith?

MARY. Mama, that he had still seven thousand good people in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, though the prophet thought there were none but himself.

MAMA. This should teach us charity in judging of the spiritual state of our neighbours. God



has never in the worst of times left himself without a witness, in a few faithful though often obscure followers. Do you know of any instance in later times of the church of God, when this was remarkably the case?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. I will tell you. Some hundred years ago, when the Gospel was utterly darkened with errors and corruptions, and the Bible a forbidden book, there lived in the narrow forgotten valleys among the Alps, a people, called from their residence Waldenses, who, like the "seven thousand" faithful Israelites, never bowed the knee to the Baal of Popish idolatry. When at length found out, it was only to be massacred and hunted like wild beasts: but God still preserved himself a remnant until happier times; and the descendants of these good people are now worshipping Him under their own vine and fig-tree, with "none to make them afraid," and the praise (far above all earthly renown) of having "kept the faith once delivered to the saints" in uninterrupted apostolical purity. You shall read a charming account of them, written by a clergyman who was there. — We will leave the call of Elisha, in the few last verses of this chapter, till his history comes before us some time hence.

We have been led to-day, Mary, into a subject

perhaps somewhat beyond your years,—*all* it has suggested, you may be too young to follow and apply. But useful lessons lie everywhere on the surface of Scripture, where “he who runs may read them.” If the Law was given with such awful warnings, to break or trifle with it must be sinful in the extreme: if the Gospel, on the contrary, is a dispensation of love, to slight or despise it must be the height of ingratitude. Nothing, my dear, can take away or soften the terrors of the Law, but the Gospel; and if its “still small voice” is heard in vain *here*, it must be heard in thunder hereafter!

MORNING NINTH.

LESSON.—1st Kings, Chapter xx. to the end.

MAMA. We have here, Mary, a fresh proof of the humbling remark we made only yesterday ; viz. the readiness of man to forget God alike after the most dreadful judgments, and signal miracles. Neither the miseries of the three years' drought and famine, nor the wonders of fire brought from heaven by Elijah, seem ever to have made Ahab seek deliverance from Jehovah under the invasion of the Syrians. Did he attempt any resistance ?

MARY. No, Mama ; he behaved quite meanly, and said all he had was King Benhadad's.

MAMA. Did this satisfy the arrogant conqueror ?

MARY. Oh ! no ; he really was too bad ! he said he should send next day to take every thing else he or his people fancied from Ahab and his servants, even their very wives and children !

MAMA. Did Ahab agree to this insolent proposal ?

MARY. His people would not let him, Mama ; they were not so frightened.

MAMA. The most cruel are always the most cowardly, Mary ! but how did Benhadad receive this unexpected refusal ?

MARY. He threatened to take Samaria directly with his monstrous army.

MAMA. A very likely event, my dear ! seeing he had (humanly speaking) ample means to do so. Yet the proverb quoted to him by Ahab, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off," must ever apply to all arrogant boasting. What says the New Testament, something to the same effect ?

MARY. (*After thinking.*) "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

MAMA. Very right. Do you remember any instance of rash self-confidence in the Gospel, which ended in shame and confusion of face ?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. Mary ? who said, "Though all men deny thee, yet will not I ?"

MARY. Oh ! I know, poor Peter ! who was sadly ashamed, and wept bitterly.

MAMA. Yes, my child, and so he might ! Let us lay this to heart, and remember that if Peter thus fell, "boasting," of all kinds, among Christians, must surely be "excluded." But how came Benhadad's proud threats to be frustrated ?

MARY. Mama, God sent a prophet to Ahab.

MAMA. Indeed ! And had Ahab asked either advice or assistance from him ?

MARY. Oh ! no.

MAMA. A rare instance of God's preventing goodness ! Well might he say, " I am found of them that sought me not,"—when rebellious Ahab had a message of mercy ! But since it is evident he neither asked nor deserved it, what must have been God's chief end in sending it ?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. His own glory, my dear, and its vindication from the taunts of the Syrians. This was made clear by the trifling nature of the means employed. . . What does it say, farther on, that the handful of the Israelites looked like, beside the great army of Syria ?

MARY. " Two little flocks of kids," Mama.

MAMA. And yet, Mary, God gave them victory, not once, but twice ! How came the Syrians to venture back the second time ?

MARY. Oh ! Mama, for such a silly reason ! They thought the God of Israel was only a God of the hills, and could not deliver his people in the plain.

MAMA. Sad, sad ignorance, indeed, my dear ! *We* know it to be such ; a child like you sees it *now* ; but remember, that what the word of God has made plain to " babes and sucklings," the

whole wisdom of the heathen world failed to discover ! They had gods not of the hills and valleys only, but of woods and rivers, nay even of particular diseases, each of whom they considered limited to their own narrow sphere, in which alone they feared or worshipped him. Did God teach the Syrians their mistake ?

MARY. In a terrible manner, Mama ; he slew a hundred thousand of them in the plain, and King Benhadad himself could not get away this time.

MAMA. What became of him, then ?

MARY. Oh ! some of his people " put sackcloth on".....Why did they do that, Mama ?

MAMA. In testimony of humility. Sackcloth and ashes were marks of grief and penitence.

MARY." And ropes about their heads," and asked his life of Ahab ?

MAMA. Did Ahab grant the request ?

MARY. Yes, Mama, at once, and very kindly ; but God was angry. Now this puzzles me, Mama ! I thought forgiving our enemies was pleasing to him ; and treating them like brothers still more so.

MAMA. You are quite right, my dear child ; your remark is a very natural one, and an unsophisticated tribute to the superiority of those gospel principles, at that time partially eclipsed

by a darker and sterner dispensation ! Yet we must not suppose that God approves at one time what he disapproves at another ; for he is unchangeable, and there is more of mercy and brotherly love, even in the austere law of Moses, than in all the heathen codes of morality extant ; —but, under the Jewish economy, when God more visibly interposed in the punishment of his own and his people's enemies, he blamed those human instruments, whom he had appointed for the very purpose, when through self-will or self-sufficiency they defeated it. Remember it was not for fighting against Ahab that God had doomed Benhadad “ to utter destruction ;” but for blaspheming and insulting His name : and this doom Ahab had no right to remit, unless he thought his own strength and his own arm had put his enemy in his power ; and so I suppose he did, and was quite elated and flattered by so mighty a monarch asking him to spare his life. Do you remember any other instance we read lately of exactly the same offence against God ?

MARY. Yes, Mama ! Saul sparing Agag. I remember I thought it very hard he should be punished for it.

MAMA. . Why, then, did you not ask me the reason ? Never pass any thing of the kind in reading again, my dear. In neither case pro-

bably did God, who sees the heart, discern *mercy* to be at the bottom of it, but gratified pride and vanity, else he would not have expressed unmingled anger. How was Ahab made aware of God's displeasure?

MARY. By a prophet telling him a feigned story about a prisoner.

MAMA. What are such feigned stories called in the Bible?

MARY. Parables, Mama.

MAMA. Very well! you know they abound in the Gospel; but what other king in the Old Testament was convicted of guilt in the same forcible manner? (*A pause.*) Mary! Have you forgotten the little ewe-lamb?

MARY. Oh! Mama, you mean David, when Nathan said unto him, "Thou art the man!"

MAMA. Just so, my dear; a thousand sermons would have pricked his conscience less than this simple but applicable story. We have the high authority of our Lord's example for supposing such means of conviction excellent. What was David's chastisement, do you remember?

MARY. You know, Mama, we said the other day his child died.

MAMA. Yes! but this was not all. How had he slain Uriah?

MARY. Oh! "By the sword;" and there-

fore the sword was "never to depart from his house."

MAMA. Very well indeed! And how was Ahab's disobedience punished?

MARY. His life and his people's were to pay for it.

MAMA. So you see, my dear, God made little external difference between them; but how did these judgments severally affect them?

MARY. I believe, Mama, David repented.

MAMA. That he did, my dear! It was in his agony of penitence at this time that he composed the 51st Psalm; the bitterest effusion that ever issued from a broken and contrite spirit! Was Ahab also penitent?


MARY. I am not sure. It only says, "he went to his house heavy and displeased."

MAMA. Mere worldly grief, Mary, and impenitent displeasure; not the "godly sorrow that worketh repentance;" and, therefore, while David has come down to our days, a bright example of genuine and accepted contrition, Ahab is numbered with the dark multitude of those to whom "God" still "imputeth sin," and "whose iniquity is" not "covered!" Let us learn from the lesson of to-day, to draw from the obscurest events of Old Testament times, Christian inferences both as to God's severity and mercy. Though God

does not now require at our hands the life of his or our enemies, (except in the case of kings and governors, the best of whom are obliged, by their duty, to condemn, for the good of others, those whom they would far rather spare,) he still requires, Mary, implicit submission to his will, and the sacrifice of all those fancied improvements of our own upon it, which pride and Satan are always suggesting to human nature. God knows best what it is fit for us, under every circumstance, to do: and, when acting by his express commandment, we cannot be wrong. Ahab, by indiscreetly sparing Benhadad, brought on Israel, for generations to come, much temporal misery, and perpetual invasions. This God foreknew, and had intended to prevent.

But the more delightful reflection suggested by the chapter of to-day, is the certainty that the God of mercy, who sent a prophet to wicked Ahab, and delivered (for his own glory) idolatrous Israel, is readier far, in Gospel times, to "stretch forth his hands all day to a rebellious and gainsaying people," and to "rise up early and send messengers" of peace and conversion into many an unthinking and unthankful heart.

Should such knock at the door of yours, Mary,—and knock they will, my dear child, on a thousand errands of unwearied love,—oh! never let them



MORNING NINTH.

find it shut against them ! but let your answer be
like infant Samuel's, " Speak, Lord, for thy se
vant heareth !"

MORNING TENTH.

LESSON.—1 Kings, Chapter xxi.

MAMA. We have here, my dear Mary, a most shocking instance of the tyranny and oppression which, in ruder and darker times, wicked kings had it in their power to practise on their innocent people. Does it ever occur to you, among your daily causes of thankfulness, to bless God that you live in an age and a land where, if you fear God, and honour the king, and discharge honestly the duties of your station, none, not even he that sits on the throne, can "make you afraid," or deprive you of one tittle of your just rights and lawful possessions? It was not always so, even in England, my dear child. There have been days, and not very distant ones, when honouring a king, even the lawful one, led to the scaffold; and fearing God, according to the religion of the Bible, to the stake. But, praised be the Lord! we have not fallen on such "evil times;" but enjoy all the safety which a good church, a good king, and good laws, can insure. Let us not lose

sight of this, any more than the thousand other daily mercies, which, because they *are* daily and common, we are so apt to undervalue. To bring the matter home at once to your capacity and feelings, when you plant your flowers and sow your seeds so busily and confidently in the garden you call your *own*, think of poor Naboth and his vineyard. What is a vineyard, my dear?

MARY. A large garden, Mama, where grapes are grown for wine.

MAMA. Yes; and a very precious possession in Judea, whose fertile yet rocky soil was peculiarly favourable for the cultivation of the vine. Indeed the whole nation, from that very circumstance, is frequently in Scripture represented under the figure of a vineyard. Can you remember any passage of the New Testament where it is thus spoken of?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. What! Not the beautiful parable of One who planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen, after building in it a tower and a wine-press; thus testifying alike his care for the safety of the cultivators, and the utility of the fruit? Who did I tell you, Mary, was this considerate landlord?

MARY. Oh! I remember now—you said the

Jews were the vineyard, and God its rightful owner.

MAMA. Did he receive his fruit then, Mary, when he sent to seek it in due season ?

MARY. No, Mama ; these wicked husbandmen beat his servants, and killed his son, thinking to get the vineyard all to themselves.

MAMA. What did all this signify, Mary ?

MARY. The Jews rejecting and crucifying Christ, Mama, and God rejecting them for it. You made it all quite plain to me.

MAMA. My dear child, God grant I may succeed as well in impressing you with what is of yet more consequence. In the room of rebellious Israel, Christ has chosen unto himself *another* vineyard, in which you yourself are a feeble perishing plant ; needing all the sunshine of grace to enable you to support the storms of life, and all the dews of heaven to keep you from being choked by the thorns and briers of an evil world ! It has pleased our great Master, my dear, to plant us amid so many advantages of knowledge and grace denied to the ancient Jews, that he may well one day address us in the language ascribed to him by Isaiah, in a similar parable : “ What could have been done more to my vineyard than hath been done in it ? ” Oh ! Mary, let us never

give him cause to add, "Wherefore, then; when I come seeking fruit, do I find none?"—But we have wandered far from Ahab. What commandment did he first break, in desiring Naboth's vineyard?

MARY. The tenth, Mama; "Thou shalt not covet."

MAMA. Very well. I think Nathan's parable of the ewe-lamb might have come in again here, when a monarch, who had doubtless vast possessions in fields and vineyards, could not be happy without a poor man's little garden to add to them.

MARY. Yes, Mama, so it might; but do you know, I think Naboth was cross not to let him have it; when he offered money, or a *better* garden somewhere else.

MAMA. Your remark is not unnatural, my dear; but then, you are not aware how much the Jews disliked parting with their family inheritance. Indeed it was scarcely lawful for them to do so, unless pressed by necessity; and even then (by God's wonderful and wise precaution for keeping the tribes distinct,) it was to return to the original owners at the end of fifty years. Now, I suppose Naboth thought, and justly, that if it were made a garden attached to a royal palace,

his posterity would never see it again ; and this, in the eyes of a Jew, was a real calamity.

MARY. Ah ! Mama, now I understand why he was so backward about it. How charming it must be to know every thing, as you do !

MAMA. My dear child, the chief use of the scanty knowledge you envy me for, is to make me aware how little it is I *do* know. That little, however, I shall always delight in sharing with you.—What was Ahab's next sin, in consequence of his disappointment ?

MARY. Discontent, Mama. He behaved just like a naughty child ; lay down on his bed, and would not eat.

MAMA. Sad effects these, Mary, of ungoverned desires and pernicious indulgence ! He who ruled thousands of people, could not govern his own wayward temper ; nor he who owned a kingdom, dispense with a “ garden of herbs ! ” Oh ! Mary, bless God that you are placed in a condition of life which must expose you to go without many things, and experience your share of wholesome disappointments ! But who was it that by insidious counsels added fuel to Ahab's sinful passions ?

MARY. Jezebel, Mama, his wicked heathen wife. She scornfully asked, “ Dost thou indeed govern Israel ? ”

MAMA. What did this taunt, put into plain language, imply?

MARY. I suppose, that, if he was really a king, nobody could hinder him from taking by force what he could not get otherwise.

MAMA. Very well indeed, Mary. Many are the hints thrown out by Satan or evil counsellors, which, thus disguised, we can listen to, whereas, if we translated them fairly our souls would recoil from them. Jezebel seems to have thought it would be so with Ahab, for she herself, as more hardened in crime, undertook the work of darkness. We need not dwell on the iniquitous transaction, as its relation occurs twice in the chapter itself with frightful minuteness; and you have known and shuddered at it from a child. But what does the expression "Men of Belial" signify, as applied to the false witnesses hired against Naboth?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Belial is a name of the devil; and his sold servants they must be, who for money would swear away an innocent person's life! Mary, who was convicted of blasphemy and crucified, on the accusation of exactly such wretched witnesses as these?

MARY. Our blessed Lord, Mama.

MAMA. Very well. But have you observed,

Mary, a fearful aggravation of this scandalous farce of justice ? How was it ushered in ?

MARY. By a solemn fast, Mama ; Jezebel particularly ordered it.

MAMA. And do you think, Mary, God would not avenge this solemn mockery of a religious ordinance ? If *such* was their character and design, well might he say, “ Your new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting ! ” — Had Ahab much enjoyment in his dear-bought possession ?

MARY. I dare say not, Mama, as Elijah met him on the way, and prophesied terrible things against him.

MAMA. How did Ahab address the prophet, on meeting him, my dear ?

MARY. “ Hast thou found me out, O mine enemy ? ”

MAMA. Had Elijah ever done him any harm ?

MARY. No, Mama ; but he had often reproved him.

MAMA. Ah ! you see it is one sure effect of guilt to make us hate and fear good men ! But Elijah refers the whole evil to Ahab's own conduct, and denounces on him the same fate which had already attended Jeroboam and others of his unworthy successors ; adding, however, that among

them all there was "none like Ahab, who had sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up." What was to be the fate of that wretched woman?

MARY. Mama, dogs were to eat her by the wall of Jezreel?

MAMA. Jezreel, was not that the scene of Naboth's murder?

MARY. Yes, Mama.

MARY. Remember this, Mary, when you come to see it remarkably fulfilled in this haughty queen and proud beauty. You will better appreciate the threat if you are told how far, even beyond ourselves, the Jews valued decent burial; the want of which was looked upon as equally melancholy and disgraceful. And what was to happen to Ahab himself?

MARY. His blood was to be licked by dogs in the very spot where they had licked the blood of Naboth.

MAMA. Ay, Mary, God often makes the very theatre of our crimes witness their punishment! But, in the mean time, we read of something which, though it did not finally avert the sentence, yet for some time delayed its execution. What was it?

MARY. Mama, who would have thought it ?
Ahab repented !

MAMA. Ah ! Mary, may we not rather say, who could have thought that the Lord would accept such tardy repentance, and from such a confirmed sinner ? Let us beware of drawing undue encouragement from this example. God forbid “ we should continue in sin because grace hath abounded ! ” But it may serve to display, in stronger colours, those unsearchable riches of God’s mercy, which would delay even temporal judgments on such late and inefficient repentance. If Ahab, by clothing his body in sackcloth, and “ going softly ” for a few short weeks, could rescue his latter days on earth from impending calamity, shall not we, if we cover our sins with the ample robe of Christ’s righteousness, and in his strength “ walk humbly with our God,”—be blessed with “ peace at the last,” and escape from the unrevealed terrors of the second death ? When tempted to despair, let us think of the case of Ahab ; but when, as is far more dangerous, we feel inclined to presume, let us remember that his sentence on earth was not remitted, and that his doom beyond the grave is worse than doubtful !

MORNING ELEVENTH.

LESSON.—1 Kings, Chapter xxii. to 51st Verse.

MAMA. We have here, my dear Mary, one of those unhappy instances, too common in Scripture and the world, of unhallowed connexion for purposes of mere temporal advantage, between those who “fear God, and those who fear him not.” Such alliances can seldom be, even humanly speaking, profitable; while, in a spiritual point of view, they must ever be presumptuous and unsafe. “Can a man touch pitch and not be defiled?” is the emphatic language of Scripture on the subject; yet sooner may this be the case, than a believer unnecessarily join himself (like Jehoshaphat here) to the wicked, without imminent peril to his person or principles, or probably both. We have had too much painful reason to know, Mary, what sort of a person Ahab was; but what do we read in this chapter of Jehoshaphat?

MAMA. Mama, it says in the 43d verse, “that

he walked in all the ways of Asa his father : he turned not aside from doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

MAMA. A comprehensive, though brief character ! But, as the mistakes and shortcomings of good people are fully more calculated to edify and instruct us, than accounts of unmixed wickedness, I wish to bring you still better acquainted with one, who, though, like ourselves, no stranger to God, yet suffered himself to be ensnared into evil company. Let us turn to the book of Chronicles, a very useful supplement to the one we are reading, and always much fuller, where the kings of *Judah* (to whom it chiefly relates) are concerned. We have there, through several chapters, a delightful account of Jehoshaphat,—of his steadfastness in the worship of God, and hatred of idolatry ; of his piety in prosperity, and faith in peril ; of his sending through all the land of Judah, teachers, furnished with the book of the law of the Lord ; and of his appointing judges, and not only charging them to deal faithfully between man and man ; but to warn ~~their~~ brethren not to trespass against God ; in short, as bright a record of kingly virtues, and their glorious reward in the favour and protection of God, as the Bible furnishes ! What, then, my dear Mary, could tempt such a monarch to join himself with Ahab ?

Well might a prophet meet him on his return, and say, "Therefore is wrath upon thee from the Lord." But, he adds, "Nevertheless, there are good things found in thee," &c. &c. Now, Mary, let us try and discover, from the chapter before us, in addition to what we have gathered elsewhere, *one* at least of these good things. What was the remarkable difference between him and Ahab, when they had agreed to go together to battle?

MARY. Mama, Jehoshaphat would not stir without inquiring of the Lord.

MAMA. Mary, do *we* always "inquire of the Lord," before we engage in any promising scheme or favourite enterprise? I fear not, else we should not see such numerous and lamentable failures.

MARY. But, Mama, we have no prophet now to let us know what God chooses us to do.

MAMA. No, Mary? I thought we had *all* the prophets, "yea, and more than a prophet," in our Lord Jesus Christ, the great end and subject of all prophecy. The prophets of old were men of like passions with ourselves, who could only tell us, when the Spirit of the Lord was upon them, what he would have men to do, or abstain from; Christ, our King as well as Prophet, can give us power to perform what he first shews us to be right. After the example, then, of good Jehosha-

phat, never begin any undertaking, without asking of your Bible, and its faithful interpreter, the "still small voice" within, if what you propose is agreeable to the will of God ; and, *therefore*, for your true interest. Whom did Ahab send for to please his religious neighbour ?

MARY. No less than four hundred prophets, Mama ! I wonder where he got so many.

MAMA. Why do you wonder, my dear ?

MARY. Because, you know, Jezebel had killed most of the Lord's ; and Elijah slew nine hundred and fifty of Baal's at the brook Kishon.

MAMA. Well remembered ! Whose do you suppose these four hundred to be, then ?

MARY. I don't very well know ; they used the *name* of the Lord.

MAMA. Ah ! but you might know by one unerring test. Did they speak *truth*, Mary ?

MARY. No, Mama ; but then a lying spirit was sent to deceive them.

MAMA. Depend upon it, Mary, that was never the case with any true and faithful servant of God ! The vision which reveals to us this glimpse of the counsels of Heaven is mysterious ; and, as other heavenly things, would doubtless be too deep for our present faculties. But of one thing we may rest assured, *viz.* that the spirits that surround the throne of God have no errands to the

good but those of love and mercy. If they ever *are* made ministers of error and condemnation, it must be to those who are already, by their own perverse wickedness, the "heirs of wrath." Was Jehoshaphat satisfied with the flattering answers of the false prophets?

MARY. No, Mama; he was still anxious for a prophet of the Lord.

MAMA. Ay! those who have once listened to their "sure word of prophecy," are not to be put off easily with "the lying words of vanity!" Was there, at this time, any prophet of God in Israel?

MARY. Mama, surely Elijah must have been away somewhere, for Ahab only mentions one, "Micaiah, the son of Imlah."

MAMA. Was he at all like Elijah?

MARY. Yes, Mama, very like; for he "prophesied only evil against Ahab," and the king hated him for it, as he did Elijah.

MAMA. Did Micaiah, when sent for on this occasion, depart from his usual frankness?

MARY. No, Mama; not even though the man who was sent for him, advised him to say what would please the king.

MAMA. A sure mark of God's true servants, Mary! They have but one language for the court and the cottage, and regard no monarch but the

King of kings ! Yet I thought Micaiah *did* at first say to Ahab like the rest, " Go up and prosper."

MARY. Ah ! but that was in jest, Mama ! just as Elijah laughed at the prophets of Baal. The king saw he was not in earnest.

MAMA. I am glad *you* saw it. How did Ahab make him answer seriously ?

MARY. He adjured him, " by the living God," to speak the truth.

MAMA. And what fearful truth did he then utter ?

MARY. " I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd ; and the Lord said, These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace."

MAMA. What did he mean by this, my dear ?

MARY. I suppose that Ahab would be killed in the battle ; because, Mama, when he *was* killed, it says, " there was a proclamation made for every one to go home to his city and country," just as God had said would happen.

MAMA. Very well put together, my dear child. A little practice has enabled you already to connect prophecies with their accomplishment ; carry it further still, and bring them home to your own breast. What other most remarkable prophecy was fulfilled in the event of this battle ?

MARY. Oh ! Mama, Elijah's shocking one ; that dogs should lick Ahab's blood where they had licked Naboth's.

MAMA. Was this *likely* to happen ? have dogs often access to wounded kings ?

MARY. No, Mama, it happened by chance, when they were washing the bloody chariot.

MAMA. My dear, there is no such thing as chance ; though we do not always see the contrary so plainly as here. But how came Ahab to be killed ? I thought he took great pains to disguise himself.

MARY. So he did, Mama ; but " a man drew a bow at a venture, and smote him between the joints of the harness."

MAMA. The man did it unconsciously, Mary ; for he little suspected it was the king he was aiming at ; but it was God who sent the arrow home, to vindicate his glory, and show that no disguises can avail to defeat his word. Did not Jehoshaphat also very narrowly escape ?

MARY. Oh ! yes ! being in his robes, he was taken for Ahab, and, if he had not called out, would have been killed too.

MAMA. So that, in addition to the needless waste of his people's blood, in this unholy expedition, he very nearly paid for being in evil company, with his own life. How his conscience

must have smitten him, when, after God had given him "rest from all his own enemies," and "fear in the eyes of all the nations round," he was near perishing in wicked Ahab's quarrel, in a battle undertaken against the express command of God ! Did this undeserved preservation keep him clear of evil associates all the rest of his days ?

MARY. I suppose so, Mama ; for it says he would not let Ahab's servants go with his from Tarshish in the ships that were broken at Ezion-geber.

MAMA. So says this chapter, certainly. Yet the Book of Chronicles, on the whole very partial to Jehoshaphat, distinctly tells us the contrary ; and even assigns, on the authority of a prophet, this fresh alliance with Ahab (or his family at least) as the cause why the ships *were* broken ;—a highly probable, and, I cannot help concluding, true account of the matter.

What have we to gather, on the whole, from this interesting chapter ! The old yet humiliating lesson of the frailty of the best of mortals ; the well-known yet ever delightful record of God's unwearied mercy to such offenders ; and the difficult and more important lesson of bringing these gracious instructions home to ourselves. Have *we* never, Mary, "made affinity with Ahab," in the shape of some evil companion, or pernicious habit,

or forbidden pleasure? If so, let us think we hear the prophet of Judah addressing ourselves, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, or love them that hate the Lord?" or the Apostle Paul yet more explicitly declaring, "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners."

MORNING TWELFTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter i. to the end.

MAMA. My dear Mary, we have in this chapter in very striking contrast, the opposite and remarkable effects of unbelief and faith ; of the former, in hardening and utterly ruining both soul and body, as in the case of Ahaziah ; and of the latter, in averting, by its humbling and salutary influence, not only the temporal, but, perhaps, eternal judgments of God, in the person of the third “ Captain of Fifty,” sent by the impious monarch to defy the Lord of Hosts by the seizure of his prophet.—For the birth and education of Ahaziah, (which it is likely had much share in his impiety,) we must look in the concluding verses of the former chapter. Who was he, my dear ?

MARY. The son of Ahab, Mama.

MAMA. Almost enough, Mary, to insure his profligate breeding up ; especially as his wicked parents’ long reign and life allowed ample time for him to grow up under their corrupting influence. Did he follow the example of his father ?

MARY. Oh yes;—it says, “he walked in his way.”

MAMA. And what does that imply? What have we seen to be Ahab’s prevailing sins?

MARY. Idolatry, Mama; “for he made a grove,” and “worshipped Baal;”—and hatred of good men, for he wanted to kill Elijah;—and greediness, for he could not be happy without Naboth’s vineyard; and many more bad things.

MAMA. Very right, my dear. You have mentioned the chief features of his unholy, and therefore unhappy life, very correctly. Whose “way” did Ahaziah walk in besides?

MARY. His mother’s.

MAMA. And who was she?

MARY. Oh! Jezebel, you know; the wickedest woman that ever lived—that killed God’s prophets by hundreds, and hired false witnesses to get Naboth stoned, and told Elijah she would have his life “by to-morrow morning.”

MAMA. Good again, Mary! Your attention and memory give me great satisfaction. God grant, my dear, you may apply what you so well remember. Did Ahaziah go farther than his immediate parents for models of impiety?

MARY. Yes, Mama, he followed “Jeroboam the son of Nebat,” who, you know, made golden calves for gods.

MAMA. No wonder God was "provoked to anger," as we read here! How did he testify his displeasure?

MARY. By cutting him off so soon, Mama, I suppose, for he only reigned two years.

MAMA. Yes, my dear; *here*, as in some cases we spoke of lately, early removal was an evident judgment, though it can never be safely taken as a general proof of God's anger, seeing that Ahab, Saul, and other capital offenders, lived to grow grey in sin, and were punished by being allowed "to fill up the measure of their iniquities."—What accident did God make use of to "cut off" Ahaziah?

MARY. He "fell out of a lattice in his upper chamber." This was a very odd accident, surely, for a grown person.

MAMA. My dear, it is supposed he was sleeping, as is the custom of the Jews and other eastern nations in summer, on the flat roof of his house; down the stair or ladder leading to which a person suddenly or partially awaked might easily fall. But we need not seek far for second causes, when we know that God can make a false step, or a prick of a pin, as effectual a minister of vengeance as a lion or an army. Did the serious consequences of his fall convert Ahaziah, or lead him to seek the true God?

MARY. Oh, no ! he never seems to have thought of *Him* ! But, Mama, what made him leave his own false gods—of whom, I am sure, he had plenty—to seek and ask advice from Baalzebub, god of Ekron ?

MAMA. Mary ! what tempts *us* to forsake the God in whom we yet profess to believe—to seek our health, our honour, and our happiness from a thousand distant and untried idols ? When one disappoints us, or we tire of it, we seldom fail to send forth “messengers,” like Ahaziah, to bring us delusive hopes from a fresh quarter. Do you know the meaning of Baalzebub ?

MARY. No, Mama : Is it the same as Belzebub ?

MAMA. Yes ; and so has come to stand for a title of the devil generally ; but its real signification is “ King of Flies.”

MARY. Oh, Mama ! what a silly trifling name for people to give their god !

MAMA. You would not perhaps think so, were you aware what dreadful scourges, in hot countries, the insect tribes become. Modern travellers tell us, that Ethiopia, and parts of Abyssinia, are not only uninhabitable by men, at particular seasons, from the plague of “ flies,” but that the very herds of cattle flee for their lives, before

what you think such trifling foes. God himself, when threatening his people with the most dreadful judgments, says, "I will hiss for the fly upon them;" and by some is here supposed to mean the locust, a creature, you know, something like a large grasshopper. Clouds of them come (doubtless at *His* command), no one knows from whence, eating up every thing green before them, till a flourishing country becomes a desolate waste. You will never despise the "King of Flies" again, my dear: that is, if you could suppose he *had* the power attributed to him.

MARY. But, Mama, how silly it was, at least, in the people of those days to think there *were* particular gods for "flies," and "hills," and "valleys," and that one could help or cure them, more than another.

MAMA. Not a whit more silly, my dear, than our ignorant Catholic neighbours in our days, who not only think *one* dead saint (a man just like themselves) can help or relieve them more than another, but even *one* wooden figure or canvass picture of the *same* saint! They need never tell us they do not worship these saints, far less their graven images, when they send for such to their sick-beds, or go miles in quest of them, like Ahaziah sending to Baalzebub. But we must

not content ourselves, Mary, with wondering at, or even pitying them ; we must pray to the *only* God, who can reach the heart, to enlighten and convert theirs to himself, and keep us humble amid our superior knowledge and advantages.—Did Ahaziah's messengers fulfil their commission ?

MARY. No, Mama ; Elijah met them, and told them, that, on account of his despising God, the king should not recover.

MAMA. How did they describe Elijah to the King, when he asked who turned them back ?

MARY. As a " hairy man," Mama, " with a girdle of leather about his loins."

MAMA. Who in the New Testament, Mary, wore the same primitive dress ?

MARY. John the Baptist ; who was " clothed with camel's hair, and a girdle of skin about his loins ;"—and he ate " locusts" too, Mama,—the nasty destructive creatures you were talking of.

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; that proved his fare to be as homely as his garments. But was ~~there~~ not a far more essential resemblance between him and Elijah ?

MARY. They were both prophets, were they not ?

MAMA. Yes ; that is a general resemblance. But they are specially coupled in a great many

parts of the Bible, and John is expressly foretold by Malachi under the actual *name* of Elijah ; which led to the mistake, common among the Jews in our Lord's time, that Elijah would come to earth again before Christ's day. Let us see what Malachi says, in the two closing verses of the Old Testament scriptures. " Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."—Mary, these are serious words ; almost implying, that the Gospel, God's gracious message of mercy, by being rejected, would assume towards *some* the awful shape of a judgment. Let it not be so with us, my child !—But how do we know with certainty that John the Baptist was the Elijah (or Elias, as the modern Jews called him) prophesied of by Malachi ? We have, first, the Holy Spirit's authority, by whose inspiration his father Zacharias said of his infant child, " He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of *Elias*." And we have the repeated testimony of our blessed Lord to the same effect. While John yet lived, he says, " If ye will receive it, this is *Elias*, which was to come ;" and, after the murder of the prophet by Herod, " But I say unto

you, that *Elias* is come already, and they knew him not, and have done unto him whatsoever they listed." And the Evangelist adds, "Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist."

We can never after this doubt the scriptural connexion between the two great prophets of the Law and the Gospel. It is made still more manifest by their similarity as preachers of righteousness, and fearless reprovers of vice. We know that, for this very latter reason, Herod took away John's life. Did Ahaziah succeed in his design upon Elijah's?

MARY. Two "Captains of Fifty," and their men, who went to take him, were all consumed by fire from heaven.

MAMA. Dreadful, indeed! and enough to appal the most obdurate tyrant. Do we read any where in the Gospel of any thing relating to this?

MARY. I don't remember.

MAMA. I hope you will, when I tell it you now. The disciples, disgusted with the narrow-mindedness of some Jews who ill-used them, because they seemed going to Samaria, asked Christ to call down fire from heaven upon them, as *Elias* had done here. Only think, Mary, of the inconsistency of such unchristian feelings in the fol-

lowers of the meek and lowly Jesus ! and the glaring absurdity of wanting to punish others, for what they were thus far more guilty of themselves ! Never forget our Lord's mild, but awful rebuke : " Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

But, as I have often told you, God's ways, in Old Testament times, are no rule for Christian conduct now ; and when His servants then, at His command, called destruction on His enemies, they were but passive instruments in His hand. Did this signal judgment convert nobody ?

MARY. Oh yes ; it made the third Captain of Fifty fall on his knees before Elijah, and beg his life and those of his soldiers.

MAMA. So it is, Mary, in our own times. Though fire no longer comes openly from heaven to terrify sinners into humiliation before God, judgments scarcely less awful, though more silent, are ever at work around us. Impenitent transgressors feed the unseen flames of hell, if not the visible fire from heaven ; multitudes, to whom the " fifties" of these presumptuous captains are as a grain of sand to the desert, or a drop to the ocean, refuse to believe and repent, and perish miserably at our side !

But how few, how very few, like this penitent

commander, turn unto the Lord, and beg the life, the eternal life, of their immortal souls ! And yet as surely as this fearful suppliant went back to his king unhurt, will every humble and sincere petitioner for Christ's unbounded salvation go down to his house, not only "justified," but "re-joicing."

MORNING THIRTEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter ii.

MAMA. Few things in Scripture, my dear Mary, are more striking and impressive than the account we here have of the translation of an eminent servant of God directly to His glorious presence, without, like the rest of mankind, passing through that dark valley which all, except two of the sons of Adam, have, in consequence of their first parents' transgression, been doomed to encounter. Can you tell me the name of the other favoured individual, who, for retaining, like Elijah, "his integrity" amid prevailing wickedness, also ascended at once to the presence of his Maker?

MARY. Enoch, Mama, who "walked with God, and was not, for God took him."

MAMA. Very well! Remember they were both preachers of righteousness, as well as prophets. We have the authority of the Apostle Jude for knowing that Enoch, "the seventh from Adam," foretold the coming of our Lord, to judge the

world, as an argument for present reformation. Who was the witness of Elijah's wonderful translation ?

MARY. Elisha, Mama.

MAMA. And who was he ? where have we any account of him ?

MARY. Some chapters ago, Mama, it told about him ; but you made me pass it over till another time.

MAMA. Yes, because it was then quite detached, and consequently less likely to be remembered, than we shall find it now. Turn back to 1st Kings, 19th chapter, and see what it says of Elisha.

MARY. Mama, Elijah was desired by God to anoint him for his successor.

MAMA. A great distinction, Mary ; and did he owe it to his rank, or station, or learning ?

MARY. Oh ! no ; he could hardly have been either rich, or great, or learned ; for he was ploughing in the field when the prophet found him.

MAMA. A fresh proof, my dear, (could any be wanting, besides the Apostles and early disciples of our Lord), that there are qualities of the heart and mind that God values in his servants, which the humblest, as well as the most highly gifted, may possess. Which of these, should you say, from what happened here, characterized Elisha ?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. What have I often told you that God prized above costly sacrifices, or any thing else in the world? *Faith and sincerity!* How did Elisha shew his faith?

MARY. By leaving his oxen, I suppose, and running after Elijah, when he came to call him to God's service.

MAMA. Very right. And how did he prove he was in earnest?

MARY. Because he would hardly go back to take leave of his father and mother, for fear of not seeming willing to give up all.

MAMA. Right again. What does the Gospel say on this head? "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." And again, "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in the present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting." Bless God, my dear, that in our day such heart-rending sacrifices are not exacted from us: but remember, that the *disposition* to resign all, if needful, for religion, is as precious in God's sight now, as in the days of Elisha. Do you not think the honour and advantage of attending and learning from Elijah richly repaid him for his

“ twelve yoke of oxen ? ” But this was the least of his reward, as we shall see by-and-by.—To return to our chapter. To what fresh trial did it please God, through his prophet, to put the new disciple’s faith and zeal ?

MARY. Mama, Elijah three times begged Elisha to stay where he was, and not to go with him, and spoke as if God had bid him. Was that quite right, when it was only to try him ?

MAMA. My dear, if it were as you suppose, your remark would be just ; but you have taken it up hastily. The prophet does not say, or even imply, that God did not wish his servant to go with him, but only dispensed with his services, as from himself. Did Elisha profit by this permission ?

MARY. No ; he said, “ As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

MAMA. Strong language ; its tenor reminds me (I wonder if it does you ?) of another young convert, who, when pressed by her mother-in-law to stay behind in her own country, protested with equal sincerity that she would go with her, and received a like rich reward. Do you know whom I mean ?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. Who *clave* to her mother-in-law, when

her sister only *kissed* her? Who went out to glean after the reapers of Boaz?

MARY. Oh! Mama, you mean Ruth! How could I forget such a pretty story! She *was* rewarded, indeed, by marrying so good and rich a man, after she and her mother had been starving.

MAMA. Ah! but Mary, that was the least of it. Do you not know wherein her *chief* reward lay? The circumstance, but for which we should hardly have known her name or history to this day?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. I will tell you. She became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David; and she had thus the honour of being ancestress to that pious monarch and the whole royal family of Judah—but to whom besides, Mary?

MARY. I never remember hearing.

MAMA. Mary! who is called the “Son of David,” many times in the New Testament?

MARY. Christ, Mama. I know now. The blind man said, “Have mercy on me, thou Son of David.”

MAMA. Very well. You see now that if Ruth had staid behind in Moab, amid plenty of food, and the society of her countrymen, instead of following poor forlorn Naomi, for the sake of the

true God—she would never have held a distinguished place in the genealogy of Christ, or the history of the Bible! What happened, my dear, when Elijah and his faithful servant came to the river Jordan?

MARY. Elijah wrapped his mantle together, and the waters divided and let them pass.

MAMA. Did this ever happen before?

MARY. Oh! yes; at the Red Sea.

MAMA. Right; but it is not of that I am speaking. Do you remember what I told you lately of the taking of Jericho?

MARY. Yes; the walls fell down when the priests blew the trumpets.

MAMA. Very well. Now, this wonderful miracle was ushered in by another. The waters of this very river Jordan were divided, as now, into two heaps, and the priests bearing the Ark of the Lord passed over dry-shod. I dare say Elijah thought of it when he smote the waters. Indeed no good Israelite could forget it; for God made them take up twelve stones out of the very bottom of the river, to build an altar, which remained for centuries after. And *why* was this done, think you? Just that the Jews might explain to their children the meaning of this and many other wonderful works of God, as I am endeavouring to do to you now, Mary. Now

good of God thus to provide for the religious instruction of generations unborn! But mind, he says, "When your children shall ask you," plainly expecting in *them*, both desire to learn, and docility to profit. What happened when the present and future prophets had passed over Jordan?

MARY. Elijah asked Elisha, "What he should do for him?"

MAMA. Did the young man choose riches, or honours, or long life?

MARY. No, Mama; a "double portion of his master's spirit."

MAMA. This choice at once proved his fitness for the office to which God designed him. Who made the same sort of choice, Mary, on a similar offer from God?


MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Who was the wisest man that ever lived, Mary?

MARY. Solomon, Mama.

MAMA. True. But was that wisdom his own? No, my dear; the Bible tells us it came from God, who was so pleased with his asking it, that he added riches, and honour, and a great many things beside.—Was Elisha's petition granted?

MARY. Yes; provided he could see his Master when he went up to heaven.



MAMA. And did he do so ?

MARY. O yes ; it must have been a glorious sight ! A chariot of fire, and horses of fire ! How I should have liked to see it !

MAMA. I daresay you would. And this Elisha would have lost, had he remained with his " farm and his merchandise " and his " twelve yoke of oxen," like the ungrateful wedding-guests in the Gospel ! But what would he have lost of more consequence far than the sight ?

MARY. Elijah's mantle, Mama ; which took him over Jordan, just as it had done his master.

MAMA. It did a great deal more, my child. It proved that God had indeed chosen him to succeed Elijah ; and that the spirit of prophecy, which he had nobly requested, had indeed fallen upon him ! It also gave him consequence in the eyes of good people, for the sons of the prophets who were looking on, came and bowed before him.— But, Mary, we have a sad contrast in the end of this chapter, to this well-grounded reverence of theirs. Who mocked and reviled the new-made prophet of the Lord ?

MARY. Oh ! Mama, little children ; and they were torn by bears for it. Poor things ! perhaps they did not know better.

MAMA. If that were the case, Mary, depend upon it they would not have been so severely

punished ! It is supposed their age was such as to make them accountable, or that they were urged on by unbelieving parents (as Bethel, you know, was a great seat of idolatry), who were punished by their untimely doom. Whenever we see in the recorded judgments of God, any thing repugnant to our own limited and imperfect views, let us always first seek a probable reason ; and if disappointed, attribute the failure, in every case, to the ignorance of man, not the injustice of God ! One thing we may be certain of, there is nothing recorded in Scripture but for our instruction ; and all children may learn, from the fate of those at Bethel, that irreverence to age, and scoffing at persons or things sacred, are hateful in the sight of God. Whenever you hear senseless ridicule thrown on those whom it is your duty to look up to and respect, think of the children of Bethel and the bears ; and remember, that though scoffers may now with impunity insult God and his ministers, there is a day coming when “ He who sitteth on the heavens shall laugh them to scorn,” and “ mock when their fear cometh.”

We have two more questions suggested by this chapter. Did Elijah, my dear, ever come down again to our earth ?

MARY. I suppose not, Mama.

MAMA. Mary ! you are surely forgetting ! Who stood with our Lord and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration ?

MARY. Oh ! Elias. I did not know till yesterday they were both the same.

MAMA. Yes, that confuses older people. But who else, besides Elijah, ever *ascended* up visibly to heaven ?

MARY. Our blessed Lord, Mama. While his disciples were looking, " he was received up out of their sight."

MAMA. Very well. Do you remember what the angels said to them on that occasion ?

MARY. No.

MAMA. " Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus which is taken up from you, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Never forget this, my dear child. The ascension of Christ deserves our joyful attention, as a foretaste of our own ; but it is his return to judge the world, in which we have the deepest interest, and which, if we are not daily and hourly preparing, will surprise us as a " thief in the night." Therefore, " blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find *watching*."

MORNING FOURTEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter iii.

MAMA. We have in this chapter, my dear Mary, a character far more common in our own days, as well as more remote ones, than any other,—that of a person who, by a partial and imperfect reformation, laid aside some sins, only to cleave more firmly to other and more favourite ones. What is said of Jehoram, son of Ahab, and brother to the last wicked king Ahaziah?

MARY. He “wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and like his mother, for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made.”

MAMA. So far well; whose sins did he cleave to, then?

MARY. Those of “Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.”

MAMA. Still, Mary, you hear that expressive phrase resounding, and see the effects of his wicked example extending to fresh generations! How will it be, think you, with Jeroboam at the day of judgment, when God comes to require at his hand the blood of all the monarchs and subjects

of Israel whom his abominable golden calves seduced into idolatry? It will not avail him to say, like our first parent, "The serpent beguiled me," and I made them; though no doubt he did it at the same impious suggestion. What was the first public disaster which God allowed to befall Jehoram?

MARY. "Mesha, king of Moab, rebelled against him."

MAMA. My dear Mary; in almost every part of the Bible we read a great deal about Moab; and I think we would do so with more both of pleasure and profit if we knew a little about it. Do you know the origin of the Moabites?

MARY. No, Mama. But they were wicked heathens I know; because you told me marrying Moabitish women made the children of Israel to worship Baal-peor.

MAMA. Very well remembered indeed, Mary! They *were* idolaters in the time of Moses; but why should they have been otherwise? What was the connexion between them and Israel (referred to in the corresponding chapter to this one in the Chronicles), which made God command the Israelites in the wilderness "not to distress, or fight against Moab?" I will tell you—The Moabites were the descendants of "righteous Lot," and on that account God would not revoke

his gracious grant of their country to them "for a possession." A fresh proof of his mercy to unborn generations, "for his servants' sake!" But then, Mary, we may learn another and opposite lesson, how the faults of good people sadly affect their children. How would it have vexed Lot (who could not bear to see the strange people of Sodom so wicked) to behold his own progeny sunk in idolatry and iniquity, just like the rest of the Canaanitish nations! An yet this would never have happened, but for his own errors. Had he, or at least his servants, not quarrelled with Abraham about worldly advantages, Lot would never have separated from the patriarch,—never have lost some members of his family in the ruin of Sodom; nor would his posterity have forfeited the privileges of the chosen people, but would have been joined to the "seed of Abraham," and inheriting the promises to this very day. His descendant Ruth, we have seen, left her country for God. Lot, I fear, was more worldly. He went to live among notorious sinners, because their land (vain outward delusion!) was "well watered," and "as the garden of the Lord" for fertility. One would almost think God shewed his disapprobation indirectly at the time; for no sooner was Lot separated from Abraham, than the Lord made to the latter the famous promise of all the land of Ca-

naan for himself and his children. What do we next hear of Moab in the Bible, Mary?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. What king was it, Mary, who had such an ill will at, and fear of, the Israelites—that although (for the reason I before told you) it does not appear they had either done or intended him harm, he sent to hire a prophet from a great distance to come and curse them?

MARY. Oh! Balak, Mama, the king of Moab. But God did not let Balaam do it for him.

MAMA. Very true; but this was no thanks to Balak, who persevered three times in his malicious purpose. And when this wicked king and prophet could not otherwise prevail, they laid their heads together to tempt Israel to transgress against God; for it was at this time that those sinful marriages leading to the worship of Baal took place, which cost the lives of many thousands of the very Israelites whom God, by his Spirit, had just before pronounced to be "blessed!" You see how soon and fatally a blessing may be forfeited! Moab seems henceforward to have lost no opportunity of hurting and attacking Israel—a bad return (as Jehoshaphat, in the Chronicles, complains) for God's merciful injunctions to spare it on a former occasion. We read, in Judges, of "Eglon, king of Moab" oppressing

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Israel" for eighteen years ; and at length they would bear it no longer, but rose against him, and "slew ten thousand of the Moabites in one day."—I suppose the two nations became upon somewhat better terms afterwards ; else Naomi and her family would not have taken refuge there from the famine, nor her sons married Moabitish wives.

MARY. That was not right surely, Mama ?

MAMA. No, my dear ; and therefore perhaps it was that the connexions were both early dissolved by death. But, though wrong in themselves, one of these marriages we know proved a blessing to Ruth, and brought her acquainted with the true God. Thus does *He* make even the transgressions of men, like their "wrath, to praise him !" But it is time to return to the pastoral monarch mentioned in this chapter, who refused to give the usual number of sheep and fleeces to Jehoram. What are such acknowledgments of sovereignty called ?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. They are called "tribute."


MARY. Oh ! then Mesha was wrong not to give it ; because you know our Lord even wrought a miracle to get money to pay his !

MAMA. Very well remembered and applied, Mary ; but we must always look at home. Do

we ourselves pay to the great King of the Universe daily and cheerfully, and from the heart, the "tribute of praise," and gratitude, and obedience, due to him who gives us "all things richly to enjoy?" I fear not; and till we do, we have no right to wonder at others. Mesha owed the king of Israel nothing, *we* owe the King of kings every thing! Mesha served Israel from fear, and rebelled as soon as he could; *we* ought to serve God from love, but alas! we are rebels likewise! His rebellion did not profit him, Mary; far less will ours. He was reduced to such extremity as to sacrifice his son and successor to his false gods—a shocking transaction, abhorrent to God and man! but useful to us, as a faint image of what our desperation may be when we find our rebellion has cost us our souls; when we call on the "hills to fall on us, and the rocks to cover us," from the presence of the King we have defied. What mention is made of Jehoshaphat in this chapter?

MARY. Oh! Mama, he joined himself once more to Ahab's son, just like the time before.

MAMA. Ay! you see how prone we are to repeat sin, notwithstanding repeated warnings! What danger did Jehoshaphat share in this time with the king of Israel?



MARY. Both their armies were nearly dying for want of water.

MAMA. Were there only two kings, and two armies?

MARY. No, Mama; the King of Edom went with them.

MAMA. Ah! that is another race connected with Israel, whom you ought to know something about. Do you happen to do so?

MARY. No, not I, Mama.

MAMA. Don't forget when I tell you now. The Edomites were the posterity of Esau, and on that account also protected by God, though no part of the chosen seed of Abraham. It must have been for *his* sake and Isaac's; for Esau himself had meanly sold his birthright, as I am sure you remember. So he had temporal prosperity for his portion, but no share in the spiritual promises of God. What prophet helped the three kings out of their distresses?

MARY. Elisha, Mama.

MAMA. And for whose sake?

MARY. Only Jehoshaphat's, Mama; but for him he would not have answered the King of Israel.

MAMA. Another instance that sinners often profit by being joined to good people, though the

reverse can never be the case. What did Elisha's prophesying procure ?

MARY. Water, Mama ; it filled all the great ditches he had ordered to be made, nobody knew how.

MAMA. *You* know, Mary. It came from the Lord, to whom fire and water, the elements of his hand, are alike obedient. But there is something more precious still, of which this seasonable supply should remind us, that " living water " which he has made to overflow the earth, and of which every one that thirsteth may drink " without money and without price." Have we ever asked him to send down into our hearts these refreshing and living waters ? Have we ever dug channels there to receive them, and cleaned out those choked receptacles, that they might be as a " well within us, springing up unto everlasting life ? " If not, Mary, let us begin immediately. It was on the last day of the Feast our Saviour gave the gracious invitation—" Ho ! every one that thirsteth !" and this may be the last day we have given us to profit by it.

MORNING FIFTEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter iv.

MAMA. The chief feature of this beautiful chapter, my dear Mary, is the encouragement it holds out to the two great virtues of Faith and Charity; which latter, in the rich Shunamite woman we there read about, shewed itself in the form of hospitality towards a servant of God. This is a duty much extolled in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testament. St. Peter tells us to “use hospitality one to another without grudging.” St. Paul says, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers;” adding, “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” Can you tell me to what the Apostle here alludes? One particular instance of which indeed bears a great general resemblance, in some circumstances, to the narrative in this chapter?

MARY. Lot took in angels, Mama, when they seemed in want of lodgings, and they saved his life; is that what you mean?

MAMA. Not exactly, Mary, though I am glad

you remember it. But a better man than Lot owed to his hospitality a blessing far beyond the prolonging or even saving of temporal life. Let me see if I can lead you to the connexion. What did Elisha offer to do for the worthy Shunamite?

MARY. Any thing she pleased, Mama; that shewed his gratitude, did it not?

MAMA. Yes, my dear; all true servants of God are desirous to return his benefits to those who have been made his instruments in bestowing them. And you are aware, I hope, that it was as a "man of God," that the Shunamite so considerately provided for Elisha. Don't forget this: it makes what is often done out of common good-nature, a special act of religion. But what grace did the answer of the Shunamite to the prophet's offers of temporal promotion and advancement give proof of? What *was* the answer?

MARY. "I dwell among mine own people."

MAMA. A more beautiful and pious rebuke to ambition and covetousness *was* never delivered, than these apparently simple words convey! But tell me what blessed temper they peculiarly manifested?

MARY. A contented one, Mama: but then she had plenty, and wanted for nothing.

MAMA. My dear Mary, does it consist with even your limited experience, that this state of abundance always leads to content? I fear it is more apt to be the parent of foolish and unreasonable desires. Contentment, when joined, as the Apostle joins it, with "godliness," is as often (if not oftener) "great gain" to those who have little else besides, as to the worldly prosperous. But there are few human hearts (even pious ones) that have not an unsatisfied wish lurking within them. What was the Shunamite's? though' she modestly abstained from mentioning it, probably indeed looking upon it as an impossibility.

MARY. She would have liked a child, Mama; but had given up hopes of one.

MAMA. My dear, the wish is neither a sinful nor uncommon one; but why was it to a Jewess an object of the fondest anxiety? I think I have told you before; what made Mary "blessed among women?"

MARY. Oh! being the mother of Christ.

MAMA. Well! you know every daughter of Abraham, from the time of the promise to him, might have hoped to enjoy that honour. Those who were childless, of course, could not. We shall now come, I think, by degrees, to see the

connexion I mentioned at first, between this and another story which it greatly resembles, in the age of the parties, the nature of the promise, and its incredulous reception. Did the Shunamite at first believe Elisha, when he promised her a son ?

MARY. No, Mama ; she said, " Nay, my lord, do not lie unto thine handmaid."

MAMA. Now, Mary, Whom have you read of that " laughed " when God gave her the very same gracious assurance by the mouth of an angel ?

MARY. Sarah, Mama, I know now ; and God was angry with her.

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; unbelief in all its forms, and however seemingly allowable, is particularly displeasing to God. I cannot help thinking both these mothers were made to suffer for it in a similar and very appropriate manner.

MARY. How, Mama ? I suppose you mean when the Shunamite's boy died, and Isaac was all but slain by his father.

MAMA. Just so, Mary : What effect this chastisement had on Sarah we are not told ; but we find that some years' longer experience of God's goodness, and acquaintance with his prophet, made the Shunamite as striking an example of faith, as formerly she had been of distrust. How


did she behave when her only, her darling son, was brought in to her dying, and all her cares could not keep him alive ?

MARY. She laid him on the bed of the man of God, Mama : why did she do that ?

MAMA. As the holiest and safest place she could think of ; and one that testified the pious hope which God's former miracle of mercy had kindled. It was a trembling one, however, and one she durst not share with her afflicted husband,—so much must it have seemed beyond nature and probability ! But it carried her (where all *true* religious confidence must ever centre,) at once to the feet of her God, in the person of his anointed prophet. There is a beautiful peculiarity in her answers to those who questioned her on her extraordinary haste in this expedition, which has been much noticed, and dwelt on by writers on the sanctified use of affliction ? Did she stop to tell her misfortune to any one ?

MARY. No, Mama ; she always said, “ It is well ; ” though I am sure she could not *think* so.

MAMA. But she *did* think so, my dear Mary ; and it is this which has made her an example to mourners in all ages. It was “ well,” in her pious and resigned view of the subject,—if her dear child was, indeed, by the God who lent him



to her, taken unto himself, from the storms and perils of life. This we should endeavour to imitate, when, like her, "the desire of our eyes is taken away with a stroke." But, when she answered, "It is well," there were no doubt brighter and more cheering anticipations secretly inspiring the reply, of the possible restoration of her beloved son through the power of God, and intercession of his prophet. These, Mary, it is our proud and blessed privilege to share to the uttermost; yea infinitely to transcend. *She* only looked for a few short years at most, of her son's prolonged society upon earth. *We* commit no believing friend to the "faithful keeping" of God, whom we are not as certain, as the promise of "Him who cannot lie" can make us,—of enjoying for ever throughout the ages of eternity. What a poor boon was her's—(precious as it must have seemed in a sorrowing mother's eyes)—to that assurance of "life and immortality brought to light" by Christ in the Gospel! or (to resume the scriptural connexion before touched upon,) even to the revival, in the restoration of Isaac, of all the bright train of spiritual hopes, well nigh dead with him, in the bosom of Abraham and Sarah! But, let us remember that while the offer of the Saviour is unlimited, and he is often found of them that seek him not, yet the promise of eternal life is

limited to those who believe, and through faith in Christ, and his foreseen offering up as the Lamb of God slain from the beginning of the world, this Shunamite will a second time embrace her ransomed son, side by side with many a Christian mother and son, who to greater advantages has joined a faith like theirs.

But, confining ourselves at present to the mere return of a soul to its earthly tabernacle, who, Mary, in the New Testament, gladdened a widow mother's heart with this unasked, because un hoped for, blessing?

MARY. Our Lord, Mama; he raised the widow's son of Nain.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, with a tenderness of sympathy for human wo, which we can never sufficiently remember and adore. But I wish to call your attention to a marked difference in the two miracles. How did Elisha recall the soul of the departed boy?

MARY. He did a number of strange things, Mama, he lay down upon him, and "put his mouth upon *his* mouth, and his eyes upon *his* eyes," and so on, more than once, before the child revived.

MAMA. My dear Mary, in all that you have told me, you have left out the sole means by which the child's soul ever came back into him at all.

Can a person really dead be animated by any such external methods ?

MARY. Not unless God make them sufficient. It says, "Elisha prayed unto the Lord."

MAMA. Ah ! that was what you omitted, and without which, all the other particulars would have been an idle farce. Now, how did our blessed Lord restore the widow's son ? Did *he* use any outward means, or even pray audibly to God ?

MARY. No, Mama ; he said, "Young man ! I say unto thee, Arise."

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; with the same mild yet awful voice, which will summon from their graves all the dead to his tribunal ! He who is himself "the resurrection and the life," needed no aid to enable him to recall the souls he had made ; nor can any one who duly observes this remarkable distinction between Him and the most highly gifted mortals, ever presume for a moment to hesitate in acknowledging Him to be "God over all, blessed for ever,—Amen."

This delightful story of the Shunamite, and the reflections to which it has led, have almost made us lose sight of the several other miracles of great (though inferior) benevolence recorded in this chapter. Are you not thankful, Mary, when you read of the widow's oil being multiplied, and the

cause,—that no one can now take *you* for a bond-maid (or slave,) in case I should not be able, from misfortune, to pay what I owe? Let this make us pray that, in God's good time, the blot of slavery may be removed from the Christian world,—and pity the parents so cruelly and sinfully bereaved of their offspring! When you read of Elisha casting so simple a thing as meal into a pot of poisoned pottage, and making it wholesome at once,—recollect what our Lord says of the “little leaven which was hid in three measures of meal, and the whole was leavened,” meaning thereby the influence of Christian principles, by which this evil world may not only be bettered, but in time, we hope, rendered worthy of its Lord. The feeding an hundred men with twenty loaves *must* call a greater than Elisha to your remembrance. Who did this, in the far more miraculous proportion of five loaves to five thousand?

MARY. Our Lord, Mama; who was sorry to send the multitudes in the desert hungry away.

MAMA. He is so still, Mary, in our day; but in a higher and far more spiritual sense. We were yesterday casually reminded of the living waters, which he offers to thirsty fainting sinners. To-day, a chance word has brought him before us as the “Bread of Life,” which he who eateth

in faith and humility shall “never hunger any more,” but go on in the strength of that blessed food, not forty days only, like Moses and Elijah, to the earthly Mount Horeb, but through the countless ages of eternity, in the heavenly Zion above.

MORNING SIXTEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter v.

MAMA. We have here, my dear Mary, one of those striking and well-known Scripture histories, with which, as with that you read yesterday, you have been familiar from a child. But we are now beginning to “put away childish things,” and must dig beneath the surface of these delightful stories for the mine of spiritual wealth, which will never fail to repay our labour. The true office of the Old Testament, and all the vast variety of narratives it contains, is to lead us home to ourselves, and upwards to God and his Christ, for whose appearance and doctrines we are indeed told it is destined, as a “schoolmaster,” to prepare us. We have seldom hitherto found it to disappoint our search for either deeper or more lofty applications, than the plain letter of its words at first gave us reason to expect; and, as we proceed, and our discernment, with the blessing of God increases, this will, I doubt not, be still *more* the case. Who was Naaman, my dear?

the object of the miracle recorded in this chapter?

MARY. He was Captain of the Host of Syria, Mama; and a heathen, was he not?

MAMA. Yes, my dear; but you see this did not shut him out of the pale of God's mercies, when sought at their proper fountain. There is a circumstance also mentioned as the cause of his greatness and favour with his master, which I have not seen noticed, and which still more tends to contradict the narrow views some good people entertain of the providence of God. Why does it say Naaman was thus honourable?

MARY. "Because by him *the Lord* had given deliverance to Syria." I thought, Mama, God did not take any care of idolaters like them.

MAMA. So do many older than yourself, I fear, Mary; forgetting that, in the course of Providence, many general, nay, even particular, blessings of a temporal nature must necessarily flow to all the creatures of Him who "sendeth his rain on the just and the unjust." So convinced of this was the pious writer of the book before us, that, though a Jew, and, as such, necessarily an enemy to Syria, he ascribes that country's success under Naaman to the same Lord of Hosts he himself worshipped. Nay, if we go more deeply into the matter, we may see even a particular

providence working, as it were, visibly in favour of the body and soul of this Syrian commander; since the capture (no accidental one, we may be sure) of a little maid of Israel led to his cure from leprosy and conversion from idols. What is leprosy, my dear Mary?

MARY. Oh! you have told me often; a shocking disease all over the skin, which makes people disgusting. How disagreeable such a great man must have felt it!

MAMA. Disease and death, Mary, like Him whom they obey, are "no respecters of persons," and the greatest in worldly station are often the greatest of earthly sufferers. Leprosy (of which, thank Heaven! we now only read) was indeed a dreadful scourge; not only loathsome, but so infectious, that among the Jews lepers were not allowed to live with any one else, but excluded from all society till cured. Do you remember what our Lord bade the restored leper do, who came back to thank him, when nine others never thought of it?

MARY. No.

MAMA. He bade him "go shew himself to the priest;" because, till that was done, he durst not, by the law of Moses, have mingled with his friends and relations. But to return to our chapter, and a subject which more nearly concerns us.

Did the little maid of Israel forget her true God, and "better country," though in captivity in a heathen land?

MARY. No, no, else she would not have wished Naaman to go and try them. I hope he took her home, Mama.

MAMA. That we have no means of ascertaining; but sure we are, if she really remained faithful, she was not unrewarded by God. Let us remember, that we too are exiles in a strange and hostile country, and should have our thoughts and affections fixed on a heavenly Jerusalem beyond it, as well as the will to assist others in seeking it. What disposition did both the King of Syria and Naaman shew by their acting immediately on the information?

MARY. I think a good teachable one, Mama. Many of the Kings of Israel we have been reading of had not half so much trust in God.

MAMA. You need not go far for an example. How did Jehoram, the one now reigning, behave, when he received the King of Syria's letter, desiring him to cure Naaman?

MARY. He "rent his clothes," Mama.

MAMA. Why so, my dear? What was that a token of?

MARY. Grief and mourning, Mama; you once told me before.

MAMA. Why was he grieved now ?

MARY. Because he knew *he* could not cure any man himself, and he never seems once to have thought of God who could.

MAMA. And who rebuked this shameful want of faith in a King of Israel ?

MARY. Elisha, Mama ; *he* knew very well that God, who had given him the life of the widow's son, could surely cure Naaman if he prayed to him.

MAMA. Very well, Mary. Did Elisha cure Naaman in the manner he expected ?

MARY. Oh ! no ; he only bade him wash seven times in Jordan ; and Naaman was quite disappointed, and at first would not go.

MAMA. Was this because the method pointed out by Elisha was so difficult ?

MARY. No, Mama ; on the contrary, he thought it too easy.

MAMA. Mary, has God been pleased to make known to us any special method for recovering us from the moral leprosy and defilement of sin ?

MARY. Yes, Mama ; " the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin."

MAMA. Very well, indeed. Do all, then, embrace this simple and sovereign remedy ?

MARY. I believe not, Mama.

MAMA. No, Mary ; some are too proud, like

Naaman ; and would prefer to God's free wells of salvation, fountains of their own devising. Would he, think you, have been cured, had he remained obstinate ?

MARY. No, Mama, I dare say not.

MAMA. Neither, my dear, shall we ; if we question or slight God's gracious plan for the cure and restoration to His family of polluted outcasts like ourselves. As well might the unsanctified rivers of Damascus remove Naaman's disease, as any thing, save the appointed blood of the Lamb of God, " take away the sins of the world." Did the waters of Jordan, at length humbly resorted to, produce the desired effect on Naaman ?

MARY. Oh ! yes ; his flesh came again, like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

MAMA. So shall we become too, my dear, when in docility of mind and temper we also, as our Lord tells us, resemble " little children." What effect had his miraculous cure upon the Syrian commander ?

MARY. He was very thankful, and acknowledged that there was no God in all the world except in Israel ; and he wished Elisha to take a " blessing" from him. I thought, Mama, only priests and prophets, and such sort of people, gave their " blessing."

MAMA. Ay, in the sense in which you understand it, Mary; but here it surely means something else. What had Naaman brought from his own country?

MARY. Oh! a great deal of gold and silver, and ten changes of raiment.

MAMA. And why so; did I tell you lately?

MARY. Out of civility, Mama; not to ask a favour empty-handed.

MAMA. Very well. Now this was the sort of "blessing," or present, as we should call it, he wanted to force upon the prophet. Did he accept it?

MARY. Oh! no; he said, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none." I think he was quite right, Mama, not to take money for what was entirely God's goodness.

MAMA. A very proper view of the subject, Mary, and just what Elisha felt. Did Naaman ask any further boon from him?

MARY. Yes; "two mules' burden of earth." What could that be for?

MAMA. Mary, on what were sacrifices usually offered?

MARY. On an altar, Mama.

MAMA. And what is an altar, my dear?

MARY. I have seen pictures, of them, Mama;

they are a kind of solid tables. The one in the Tabernacle was all laid over with gold.

MAMA. True ; but frequently in early times, and at a distance from all temples, they were made with rough stones or even earth. Do you remember any thus hastily and probably rudely built ?

MARY. Mama, Balaam made Balak build seven at one time. I dare say they were just of earth.

MAMA. In all probability : and so would Jacob's be, on the spot where he had his beautiful dream. But did we not hear of a stone altar very lately ?

MARY. Yes ; the one made of the twelve stones out of the bottom of Jordan.

MAMA. Very well indeed ! You are putting *that one* just to the use God intended, by thus remembering it. Well, Naaman, I suppose, thought earth from Israel would be more acceptable to Israel's God, because its rivers were more highly favoured than those of Syria. His conversion seems to have been a sincere one, and as such no doubt accepted ; but like most earthly things, it had a great imperfection. Can you point it out ?

MARY. Mama, he seemed afraid not to bow

down still to idols, because his master did it. This was surely sinful ; was it not ?

MAMA. Undoubtedly, my dear ; “ the fear of man,” says the Bible, “ bringeth a snare,” and so must this cowardly attendance on idol worship have proved to Naaman. But we must not harshly blame him till we are sure that the same fear has never led us into compliance with customs or actions which our consciences condemn. What humbling instance of human frailty and abject covetousness, in one who should have known better, have we in the end of this chapter ?

MARY. Mama, Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, ran after Naaman, to get some of the rich presents his master had refused.

MAMA. Ay, Mary, if the “ fear of men ” slays its thousands, the “ love of the world ” destroys its tens of thousands.” What does the apostle say, on a similar occasion, of *his* servant ? “ Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world ;” and “ The love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” What judgment overtook Gehazi for his greediness ?

MARY. Oh ! Mama, the leprosy of Naaman clave to him for ever.

MAMA. A very appropriate punishment, my

dear ; which imprisoned a debased and polluted spirit in a body equally loathsome and corrupt ! But by what other sin was Gehazi's " love of filthy lucre " enhanced ?

MARY. He told a string of dreadful lies, Mama ; first to Naaman, when he asked the things, and then to Elisha, when he inquired where he had been ? and he answered, " Nowhere."—Mama, Gehazi must have been a fool as well as wicked, to think to deceive a prophet.

MAMA. My dear, what are those, then, who flatter themselves with hopes of deceiving God ! Let us not be of the wretched number, nor of those, more common still, who fatally delude themselves ! " Be not deceived," says the Apostle, " God is not mocked ;"—" he that soweth to his flesh " (like Gehazi) " shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting !"

MORNING SEVENTEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter vi.

MAMA. We have, in the beginning of this chapter, my dear Mary, one of those miracles,—trifling in appearance as compared to the restoration of health or life,—but flowing from the same spirit of universal benevolence, distinguishing a merciful God, of which several have lately come under our notice. We have had much occasion to read and talk about miracles; it is high time we should see if we can explain exactly what they are. What do you understand by a miracle, my dear?

MARY. Mama, I am not so sure of being able to tell, as when you asked me about an idol. It is just as you said; the more one learns, the more one feels ignorant. I know what *sort* of a thing it is to raise dead people and to cure leprosy, and to make iron swim; but I don't know any right word for it except a miracle.

MAMA. As I formerly told you, my dear, I *am always* much more anxious you should have

ideas than words. Many content themselves with the latter, and so go uninformed through life. Let us commence our investigation with the apparently small miracle which begins this chapter. What happened to one of the "sons of the prophets," who was engaged in building their new dwelling?

MARY. He let his axe-head fall into the water, and was vexed, because it was not his own.

MAMA. And how did Elisha restore it to him?

MARY. By putting a bit of stick into the water, and it made the iron come to the top.

MAMA. Now, Mary, this little act of mere kindness and compassion I wish to make you aware, was as complete and wonderful a miracle as the greatest on record. A miracle, my dear, is an interruption,—visibly supernatural, because impossible to man,—in what we call the "Order of Nature;" and its being in truth such (for many false ones have been attempted), depends not so much on the greatness of the end, as the insufficiency of the means used *naturally* to produce it. Now, you are sensible that, throwing a bit of light stick into a deep mighty river, had no more power of itself to make heavy iron swim, than the staff of Elisha laid on a child's face to bring back his spirit, or the waters of the same river Jordan to make a leper clean. God, who at first,

by a power called gravitation, which you are too young to understand, (though Sir Isaac Newton found it out by the falling of an apple), taught iron, like other heavy things, to sink,—could alone so suspend his own laws, as to enable it to swim,—and the invasion of that “Order of Nature,” which we forget sometimes He alone designed and sustains, was as great in this case, as when his omnipotent hand arrested in their course those heavenly bodies, which (you will one day learn), are kept in their places just by the self-same law. I wish to draw your attention to this, because we are all apt to overlook what is less dazzling in the special interpositions of Providence, as well as in its daily provision for our comfort and welfare. There is one class of miracles, the most silent though stupendous of all, which we should ever thankfully acknowledge,—the miracles of mercy, I mean, which the same power alone that lightened iron, and made rocks gush forth, can work on obdurate human bosoms. Let us ask Him, Mary, who compassionately restored the borrowed axe, to enable our sunk and alienated hearts to rise once more from the depths of sin and error, within the glad influence of the Sun of Righteousness, and to their proper rank and usefulness in his creation.

While on the subject of God’s mercy, we have

a strong instance of it in the very next verses. Who but a God of mercy would have commissioned his prophet to warn the impious king of Israel, "not once nor twice" only, of his danger from the Syrians?

MARY. So, Mama, God did not *now* take part with that nation.

MAMA. No, my dear; nor was it likely he should against his own chosen, though unworthy people. What effect had Elisha's prophetic frustration of his schemes on the King of Syria?

MARY. Mama, this time he did not behave well. He sent instead of letters and presents, chariots and horses to take him.

MAMA. Had Elisha on his side none to defend him, my dear?

MARY. Oh! yes; for when his servant was frightened, he prayed to God to open his eyes, and the young man saw "chariots and horses of fire all round about the mountain."

MAMA. A wonderful sight, Mary! and one not often revealed to mortal eyes! But remember, Elisha's answer; "they that be with us are more than they that be against us;" may be just as fearlessly used now by every true servant of God, when threatened by his great Master's enemies. What befel these enemies in this case?

MARY. They were smitten with blindness,

Mama ; and followed the prophet into the very midst of Samaria.

MAMA. They were taken, as the Bible says the wicked often are, "in their own net," my dear.

MARY. Mama, this time, when the king asked the prophet if he should kill them, he forbade him ; and yet you know God was angry with Ahab for letting Benhadad go.

MAMA. A very natural remark, Mary ; and one that shews you think of what you read ; but the cases are not quite similar. A God of justice might well require the death of a blaspheming monarch, and yet spare his ignorant and obedient instruments. The answer of the prophet to the king contains a most humane rule for the treatment of all prisoners of war. What was it ?

MARY. "Wouldst thou slay those whom thou hast taken captive with thy spear and thy bow ?" and he made him give them plenty to eat and drink, and sent them to their master.

MAMA. Did this humane and liberal treatment soften Benhadad ?

MARY. No, Mama ; he came up with all his hosts, and besieged Samaria.

MAMA. Do you know what a siege is, my dear.

MARY. Not exactly, Mama ; though I read of them in my Roman history.

MAMA. Read of nothing anywhere, Mary, without asking what it means. See if you can find out, from its effects. What was there in Samaria, in consequence ?

MARY. A dreadful famine, Mama.

MAMA. And what is a famine ?

MARY. A scarcity or want of food. I had the word in my dictionary lesson yesterday.


MAMA. Very well ! you see the use of that. Why was there this scarcity in the town ?

MARY. I suppose, Mama, because the Syrian army would not let any victuals come in.

MAMA. Exactly, my dear ; it is a great object with all besiegers. What instances have we of the dearth of provisions here ?

MARY. An ass's head, Mama, (how shocking it must have been to eat !) sold for fourscore pieces of silver ; but what could the use of the dove's dung be ?

MAMA. Fuel, my dear, in Judea, was extremely scarce and dear at all times. They had no coal, as we have, and little wood ; and they cooked their food usually with cakes made up of straw or grass, and held together by the dung of animals. What passage in the New Testament alludes to this ?



MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. What does our Lord say of "the lilies of the field?"

MARY. That "Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of them."

MAMA. But what does he add?

MARY. Something about their being "cast into the oven." I remember now it puzzled me.

MAMA. Yes, my dear, that was the fate of most vegetable substances among the Jews; and for this purpose was the dove's dung mentioned here sold for its weight in silver. But, Mary, all this dearth becomes as nothing, when we read farther of the horrible straits to which two mothers were reduced during the siege. How does the blood-curdling simplicity of the expression, "So we boiled my son and ate him," thrill through every mother's heart! beyond all the elaborate additions of an uninspired historian. But was this the only time this dreadful expedient was resorted to in Jerusalem?

MARY. I don't know, Mama.

MAMA. What far more terrible siege was it afterwards doomed to endure? and what did our Lord say of the women who should see that day? "Blessed are the barren that bear not."

And well he might; for, in the famous siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, to which Christ allu-

ded, as the first fruit and punishment of his rejection and death (and which you will read an account of in Josephus), this very same act of a parent taught the bloody conquerors of the world to shudder and grow pale! It was prophesied, too, Mary, hundreds of years before either siege. What says Moses, in his threatenings on his countrymen, if they disobeyed God. "The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness; her eye shall be evil against the children she shall bear; for she shall *eat them* for want of all things, in the siege and straitness wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee at thy gates!" Most literal, as well as awful, was the fulfilment; for, in the latter siege of Jerusalem (the most fertile in horrors the world ever saw), the unhappy mother was of the richest and noblest in the city! What effect had the heart-rending tale of the mother, in this chapter, on the king?

MARY. He rent his clothes, Mama, and seemed to wear sackcloth; but surely it was not right sorrow; as, instead of praying to God, it made him angry with Elisha.

MAMA. Very right, my dear; such is the usual effect of worldly grief on unregenerate minds. Of a piece were the words brought by his mes-

senger. He acknowledged the "evil to be from the Lord," and yet added, "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? Oh! Mary, God forbid that when *we* are chastened, such should be our language! Let us rather say with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now will I keep thy word."

MORNING EIGHTEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter vii.

MAMA. This chapter, my dear child, is one which has an especial claim on our attention, on two accounts. It affords a wonderful display of that omnipotence of God, by which his enemies are often, as it were, "broken without hand," and made "to flee when no man pursueth;" as well as of His power to bring about such events as he pleases, in the most unexpected and wonderful manner. But what still more nearly concerns us, is the instance of immediate and signal punishment of unbelief, which it records for our instruction and warning. An "evil heart of unbelief," as the Scripture calls it, is what man has naturally most to struggle with. It lost Paradise to our first parents, and to their descendants innocence and immortality; and, in our own days, continues to frustrate, in a thousand lamentable instances, the love of God, and sacrifice of Christ for our restoration. It is very shocking, Mary, but not the less true, that many among ourselves receive

the promises of God, if not with open unbelief, like the Samaritan lord, yet with a practical incredulity hardly less sinful, and quite as dangerous ; saying, like the scoffers mentioned by St. Peter, (who, *remember*, prepared the way for unbelief, by “ walking in their own lusts, ”) “ Where is the promise of his coming ? For, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation ? ” In other words, living and acting as if judgment did not concern them, and hell and heaven were a fable. Let it not be so with us, Mary ; but let us shew our faith in God’s promises, in the way He has taught us, by our works of obedience, self-denial, and charity ! What miraculous promise did Elisha hold forth in this chapter, to exercise the faith of *his* hearers ?

MARY. Oh, Mama ! I hardly wonder they did not believe him, it was so unlikely ! He said there should be plenty of fine flour and barley, selling in Samaria, at that time next day ; and cheap, too, I suppose.

MAMA. Cheap enough ! my dear. Do you know what a shekel was worth among the Jews ?

MARY. No.

MAMA. About half-a-crown ; and for this a large quantity of corn was to be sold. What said

the unbelieving lord on whom the king leaned to this prophecy?

MARY. He said it might come true, "if God made windows in heaven!"

MAMA. This was a very light way of treating the message of a man of God, Mary; even had no positive unbelief been implied. What was the prophet's indignant denunciation on the scoffer?"

MARY. "Behold thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof."

MAMA. This was replying to his doubts by a prediction still more likely to increase them. Do you remember what our Lord says of the difference God makes between those who, by humble teachable dispositions, desire to be enlightened—and the unbelieving multitude, who neither wish nor deserve it? "To you (that is, his disciples) is it given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. Therefore speak I unto them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand; and their eyes they have closed, lest they should be converted, and I should heal them." If *we* are not converted, Mary, remember the fault must be in our own stony insensible hearts, not in God's gracious message. Had the Syrian lord believed, and repented of his scoffing, he would have enjoyed, as well as wit-

nessed, the abundance sent by God. But whom did the Lord, who is "no respecter of persons," choose as the harbingers of these glad tidings?

MARY. Four leprous men, Mama, who were sitting starving at the gate?

MAMA. Why did they sit there, my dear?

MARY. I suppose, Mama, because they durst not come in on account of their disease.

MAMA. Just so; thus does God, as St. Paul says, choose "base things, and things that are despised," to forward his gracious purposes. Do you know to what circumstance in the counsels of God the apostle here particularly alludes?

MARY. No, Mama; unless he meant our Lord's being "despised and rejected."

MAMA. Very well remembered. But it was the choice of the apostles themselves, illiterate fishermen and mechanics, to preach the glad tidings of the Gospel, which Paul here speaks of, and of which I was reminded by the poor lepers being made the heralds of plenty and joy to a whole people. What was the desperate condition of these unhappy persons?

MARY. They said, "Why sit we here until we die? If we enter into the city, the famine is there, and if we sit here we die also."

MAMA. This may teach us, Mary, that even in temporal distress we are often nearest relief

when we utterly despair of it from men ; and may remind us that this holds more specially true of spiritual destitution and abasement. Indeed it is not till we feel, that “ if we sit here we die,” that any of us go savingly to our God—as the despairing lepers resolved to throw themselves on the mercy of the Syrians. Was their situation made worse by their manly resolution ?

MARY. Oh no ! Mama ; a thousand times better ! They found nobody to hurt them in the camp of the Syrians, but plenty to eat and drink, and gold, and silver, and raiment.

MAMA. Indeed ! What was become of all this mighty host ?

MARY. The Lord had made them to hear “ a noise of chariots and horses,” and they thought a great army was coming upon them, and fled for their lives, leaving every thing behind them.

MAMA. A wonderful instance, indeed, my dear Mary, of God’s power over the imaginations, as well as hearts, of His creatures ; and of what the Bible says of His enemies, “ They shall fear where no fear is.” But, my dear, ~~we~~ we have also enemies, and may draw a most cheering inference from what the lepers met with in the Syrian camp. No sooner did they resolve manfully to put their lives in God’s hand by facing their foes, than these suddenly disappeared at his command.

So will it be with us, Mary, in our conflicts with our spiritual adversaries. No sooner shall we in God's strength go forth to meet them, than His hand will make them to vanish before us—nay, even enrich *us* with the fruits of His victory! So have many Christians found to their blessed experience, and so may it be, my dear, with *us*.—But let us mark a praiseworthy circumstance in the conduct of these lepers, which seems to confirm God's choice of them as messengers of mercy. What was their next thought after satisfying their own urgent necessities, and laying up store for the future?

MARY. They said, "We do not well: this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."

MAMA. That is, they longed to make their fellow-sufferers in the city sharers in the blessings they themselves partook of. Mary, this is the true Christian spirit, and should animate every one of us. "We do not well," when, in possession of temporal affluence, we forget to make it reach our brethren. "Let him that hath two coats," says our Lord, "impart to him that hath none." But we do positively "ill," when, enriched a thousand times beyond our deserts, with the inestimable treasures of the Gospel, we neglect to extend to our less fortunate brethren a liberality which, instead of impoverishing, can

only benefit our own souls ! If our Lord severely censures those, who, seeing their brother naked or hungry, content themselves with saying, “ Be ye warmed, or filled,” instead of supplying his wants,—what will he say, think you, to those, who, with prayers on their lips, for his spiritual necessities, do not embrace all possible opportunities to remove them ? Depend upon it, it will be with them as the lepers feared it might be their case : “ If we hold our peace, some mischief will come upon us ? And what mischief, Mary ? Even the sentence of the great day, upon all who slight even the *bodies* of their fellow-mortals ; “ Inasmuch as ye did it not to these my brethren, ye did it not to me ! ” God does not yet enable you, my dear, to be a teacher or enlightener of others ; but the youngest may breathe a wish, and put up a prayer, and contribute a mite ; which (with Him who valued the poor widow’s above all the riches of the treasury,) will not go without a reward.—But we must return to our chapter. Did the King of Israel believe the report of the lepers ?

MARY. No, Mama ; he thought it was a trick of the Syrians, to draw out the Israelites and kill them ; but he sent horsemen (out of the few he had left) to see.

MAMA. And did they confirm the tidings ?

MARY. Oh yes ! the way was full of garments and vessels the Syrians had thrown away, all the way to Jordan.

MAMA. So it is always with the goodness of God, Mary. Examined and sought after, it proves ever beyond our expectations. And what was the first effect of the people's taking possession of the forsaken camp ? What did they find there more needful far than gold, or silver, or raiment ?

MARY. Corn, Mama, I suppose, in plenty ; for it was sold in the gate, just as Elisha had said.

MAMA. So far, Mary, the *merciful* promise of " Him who cannot lie " had proved immutable ! But how was the threatening of his *wrath* fulfilled also ? Remember the one is in every case as infallible as the other.

MARY. The unbelieving lord, Mama, was appointed to have charge of the gate, and the people who pressed to buy the corn, trod upon him there till he died.

MAMA. An awful verification, indeed, of the prophet's denunciation, " Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof." To perish, and by his own fault, in the midst of plenty and rejoicing, must have been doubly pain-

ful. But, Mary, let us consider what a light penalty this exclusion from worldly abundance was when compared with the feelings of unbelievers in the Gospel,—who, at the last day, while seeing their humble, despised Christian brethren entering in freely at the “strait gate which leadeth to life everlasting,” and partaking of the “fulness which is at God’s right hand for ever,” shall strive, though too late, to enter in, and shall not be able ;” and, like the foolish virgins in the parable, shall see the Bridegroom enter in to the wedding-feast, attended by his faithful followers, and the door shut, and themselves for ever excluded.

MORNING NINETEENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter viii.

MAMA. This chapter, my dear, begins with a delightful proof that God never loses sight of his faithful servants, and that, even in this world, faith and resignation often meet with their reward. What farther mercy did He shew through his prophet, to the good Shunamite, who said, "It is well," when He removed her darling son?

MARY. He gave her warning of a famine, Mama; and advised her to go where she could live best till it was over.

MAMA. Did we read lately of any one else who went into a heathen country, to avoid a similar calamity?

MARY. Yes; Naomi, and her husband, and her two sons, into the land of Moab.

MAMA. Very well. And do you recollect in Scripture any great famine that lasted exactly the same time of seven years?—and before which, God, instead of warning his servants to go away

to avoid it, sent one *into* the country, for the special purpose of moderating its effects?

MARY. No, Mama ; I don't know whom you mean.

MAMA. Mary, who kindly said to his brothers, when they fell on their knees before him, and acknowledged their fault, " Fear not, for it was God who sent me before you to preserve life?"

MARY. Oh, Joseph ! I know now ; and the seven lean cows in his dream were the seven years of famine.

MAMA. Just so ; you see God's ways of providence are as various as they are wonderful. Sometimes he warns good people to flee from the evil to come ; sometimes he brings out of their undeserved misfortunes (as in Joseph's case), the most unexpected blessings to themselves and others. Don't you think this famine in Israel seems like an appropriate punishment for the unbelief of the king and his lord (and, no doubt, many besides in Samaria) of God's gracious promise of abundance in the last chapter ? Be this as it may, the believing Shunamite escaped it ; for she went, as desired, to sojourn in the land of the Philistines, till it was over. But did she stay there a moment longer ?

MARY. No, Mama ; she returned at the seven years' end.

MAMA. So did Naomi, my dear ; and so will every true servant of God. Nothing but self-preservation or evident duty can reconcile such to a residence among sinners or idolaters. What says pious David ? “ I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of sin ! ” Was this once rich Shunamite’s condition, when she returned to her country, much better than poor Naomi’s ?

MARY. I suppose not, Mama ; for she “ went forth to cry unto the king for her house and land.”

MAMA. And what providential circumstance led to her petition being granted ?

MARY. The king was just talking with Gehazi about the great things Elisha had done, and especially his raising a dead person ?

MAMA. This *was* singular, and not the effect of accident, we may believe !

MARY. But, Mama, how came the king to be speaking to Gehazi ? I thought lepers might not speak to any body.

MAMA. Very well remarked, Mary, and perfectly right : so much so that we read of even a King of Judah who, being struck with this disease for invading the priest’s office, forfeited the kingdom thereby, and lived in confinement all his days. But as the *order* of events is not always

strictly adhered to in these historical books (especially in minor transactions,) we may either suppose this return of the Shunamite to have preceded Gehazi's punishment; or which, alas! is still more probable, that, like the rest of the law of Moses, the seclusion of lepers from society was, at this time, forgotten or disregarded in Israel. If even the latter supposition is true, it shews how God can bring good out of evil; for this unlawful intercourse of the king with a leper proved the means of restoring the good Shunamite's property. How was this brought about?

MARY. Mama! When the king heard this was the very woman whose son had been restored to life, he at once appointed an officer to get her back all that was her's, and the "fruits of her field since the day she went away."

MAMA. Very well! and was not this an ample return for her hospitality to Elisha, and piety in affliction? It was like the "latter end of Job," which God blessed more than the beginning; and the joy of Naomi in the prosperity of a daughter, who (as her neighbours truly said) was "better unto her than seven sons!" Where do we next read of Elisha's going, doubtless at the command of God?

MARY. To Damascus.

MAMA. And who there (although an idolater) availed himself of his knowledge of the future ?

MARY. King Benhadad, Mama ; he was sick, and instead of consulting his own gods, or sending to other idols, he made his servant Hazael take a present, and inquire of Elisha if he should recover.

MAMA. This shewed at least that his understanding was not hardened against evidence of the prophet's power to foretel events. But it is to the messenger and *his* fate we have chiefly to attend. Do you remember my saying earthly promotion was not always good for the person so distinguished ?

MARY. Yes, Mama, in the case of Jeroboam.

MAMA. Well, my dear, here is another still stronger one. I dare say Hazael thought it a fine thing to be entrusted with " forty camels' burden of every good thing of Damascus," and sent as the king's ambassador to Elisha ; but from that apparent honour sprung consequences which he is perhaps at this day bewailing in the lake where " murderers and all liars," we are told, shall have their place. The prophet's answer (though, like every oracle of God, strictly consonant to truth), yet partook a little of the nature of those parables or " dark sayings," which our Lord says are

spoken to the wicked in wrath instead of mercy. He must have been naturally very wicked, as God, who seeth all hearts, knew; and the temptation to crime presented by the prophet's answer would suffice (as Elisha foresaw, and wept to think of,) to break down all the feeble remaining barriers of virtue in his ambitious soul. What *was* the prophet's answer, my dear?

MARY. It sounds like a riddle, Mama. Elisha says, the king might certainly recover, but God had shewed him he should nevertheless die!

MAMA. And how was this seeming enigma solved?

MARY. By Hazael killing the king, when he got home, with a wet cloth. I daresay, Mama, the thought entered his heart, whenever Elisha told him he should be "king over Syria."

MAMA. No doubt; and yet, my dear, I am sure the terrible things he was to do when this fatal crown became his, were enough to have made him give up all thoughts of it, instead of awaking them. What were they?

MARY. Oh! dreadful things; he was to "burn the strongholds of Israel, and slay the young men, and rip up the women with child."

MAMA. Could any man, Mary, any but a *very* wicked man, desire a kingdom on such terms?

MARY. Oh no, Mama; but I don't think Hazael

believed he would ever do them. He was quite angry at the idea, and said, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?"

MAMA. Elisha's answer, my dear, simple as it was, might have been both a solemn rebuke to his presumption, and the best proof of what farther atrocities a traitor and murderer might be guilty of! "The Lord hath showed me thou shalt be king over Syria;" as much as to say, "If you commit the act which makes you *that*, any thing else may follow." Does not this calm and heart-searching reply remind you of our Lord's awful (though apparently trivial) words to Judas, "That thou doest do quickly?" Both seem to have had the same effect, of hardening those they could not save. Satan, we are told, "entered into Judas, when he forsook Christ; and no doubt so it was with Hazael when he left Elisha. Whom have we next mentioned in this chapter?"

MARY. Jehoram, Mama; a king of Judah, who succeeded his father Jehoshaphat.

MAMA. Did he inherit his virtues?

MARY. Oh! no; "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel."

MAMA. And why so?

MARY. Because he had Ahab's daughter for his wife.

MAMA. A very sufficient reason; and oh!

Mary, remember this fatal connexion, which ruined his son's soul, was the probable fruit of Jehoshaphat's sinful "affinity with Ahab." Had the kingdoms continued estranged (as worshippers of God ought to have been from idolaters,) the marriage could never have taken place. On whose account did God still forbear to destroy Judah?

MARY. David's, Mama. God had promised to give *him* "a light alway."

MAMA. Very well; but we must look for the individual punishment of Jehoram (and an awful one it was) in the book of Chronicles, which I told you goes more into particulars about the kings of Judah. Just turn to the 21st chapter 2d Chronicles. What does it say was one of Jehoram's first acts on coming to the throne?

MARY. Oh! Mama, he was worse than Hazeael; he slew all his brethren with the sword. What a monster! and he was an idolater, and made high places, and all sorts of bad things.

MAMA. What writing came to him from the prophet Elisha? (for *Elijah* is an evident mistake of transcribers, as you know he was gone to Heaven long before.)

MARY. Because he had forsaken God, and not walked in the ways of the *good* Kings of Judah, but of the wicked Ahab; and moreover, "because

he had slain his brethren, who were better than himself;" God was to smite with a great plague his people, and children, and wives, and goods; and he was to have "great sickness" till his very bowels fell out!

MAMA. And was all this fulfilled? We need hardly ask.

MARY. Oh! yes. "The Philistines and Arabians came and took away all his substance, and his wives also, and his sons; so that he had never a son left save his youngest Jehoahaz;" and it says he died of "sore diseases." "And his people made no burning for him, and did not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings."

MAMA. All terrible things, Mary; and the last a decided proof how little his subjects loved or respected him, or rather that they looked upon him as "smitten of God and afflicted." Now, we should not have known all these edifying particulars, if we had not referred to Chronicles. It is not for nothing you see that those often-repeated words are used (which so many pass over idly,) "The rest of the acts of Jehoram are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?" I dare say you never thought of this before.

MARY. No, Mama. I believe I never should, if you had not told me.

MAMA. You see, my dear, the use of our thus conversing together. Let the fate of Hazael warn us to dread presumption in our own strength, and to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." All the wickedness which so shocked him you will find he lived to commit; and no sooner was the idea of a crown put into his head than murder entered along with it.

From Jehoram's miserable end let us learn the danger of sinful connexions, and the infallible ruin here or hereafter of all who forsake God. The leprosy of Gehazi, and the horrible "diseases" of Jehoram, came both from Him who hath said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay;" and, oh! Mary, shall we not then fear One who can not only "kill the body" in so awful and loathsome a manner, but "cast both body and soul together into hell?"

MORNING TWENTIETH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter ix, x.

MAMA. These chapters, my dear Mary, (which, as containing the whole history of an individual I thought it a pity to separate,) bring us back into the dreary, though perhaps salutary, region from which many edifying stories have agreeably detained us, of God's fulfilment of threatened judgment on wicked kings, by instruments little better than themselves. For what purpose did God, through his servant Elisha, make choice of "Jehu, the son of Nimshi?"

MARY. To execute his vengeance upon the house of Ahab, Mama; and upon wicked Jezebel, his wife.

MAMA. And if unrelenting zeal and severity fitted him for the task, God could not have chosen a more suitable executioner. But, before accompanying him in his bloody work of extermination, let us examine the circumstances of his call to the office. What did Elisha do in the beginning of the chapter?

MARY. He called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, "Gird up thy loins."

MAMA. Mary, do you know the exact meaning of this expression?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. It is time you should; because it occurs so often, both literally and figuratively, in Scripture. In the former sense, it relates to the long cumbersome garments worn by the Jews, like other eastern nations—(you have seen a Turk, my dear, at least in a picture)—which are obliged to be tucked up, and confined with a girdle before a journey, or any kind of exercise. The knowledge of this will help you to understand the spiritual sense in which it is frequently used. St. Peter says, "Gird up the loins of your mind, and be sober." Christ bids us "have our loins girt about, and our lamps burning, like men who wait for the coming of their Lord." In both cases it means, "Get rid as carefully of the impediments in the work of your salvation, as messengers before starting dispose of the garments which would hinder them on their journey." What was this messenger to take with him, my dear?

MARY. A box of oil, Mama.

MAMA. For what purpose?

MARY. To pour on the head of Jehu, and tell him God had "anointed" him.

MAMA. This will explain to you the meaning of that title, so often applied in the Bible to sovereigns, and, by a figure of speech, to Christ, "The King of kings." But by whom was this mark of respect and honour literally bestowed upon *Him*?

MARY. I don't remember.

MAMA. What, Mary! Not your own namesake, who "took an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head as he sat at meat!"

MARY. Oh! yes, Mania; it was wrong in me to forget it.

MAMA. So it was, my dear; for what does Christ say? "Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her." You see it was not meant to be forgotten.—The oil used for anointing kings, was, like her ointment, "very precious," being compounded of the finest spices and perfumes, and held sacred for its royal purpose; and so ancient and venerable is the custom, as to be kept up in coronations to this day. Do you remember any other striking instance of God's unexpectedly anointing a private person to be king?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. Mary, do you not recollect Samuel (after God had rejected Saul) being sent to anoint one of the family of Jesse?

MARY. Oh! yes; to be sure I do. All the proud elder sons thought it must be one of them; and nobody dreamed of poor little David, who was out keeping the sheep.

MAMA. Ah! but you find God "sees not as man seeth. God takes him from the sheep-fold, that in him he might exhibit the excellent qualities of faith, and piety, and integrity, notwithstanding of his many transgressions which he foresaw. But sometimes God chooses instruments merely for their *fitness*; and so it was with Jehu. What was the first effect of his being "anointed?"

MARY. When he told his fellow-captains, "they put every one his garment under him on the top of the stairs, and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is King!" I know what the trumpets were for, Mama; but what did putting down the garments mean?

MAMA. This circumstance is not new to you. Mary. It occurs in the Gospel. What happened when our Lord made his public entry into Jerusalem?

MARY. Oh! the multitude "spread their garments in the way," I remember now; and others

strewed branches. I suppose it was a mark of honour and respect.

MAMA. It was so in both cases: but Oh, Mary, how different the *character* of the meek and lowly Jesus, riding gently on a mission of peace, from that of the hot and fiery Jehu, "driving so furiously" to the work of slaughter, that his name has become a by-word for all headlong charioteers to this day! What was the immediate consequence of this proclamation of Jehu?

MARY. He "conspired against Joram."

MAMA. What did I say was a conspiracy?

MARY. Several agreeing against one; and, you know, there were many other captains with Jehu.

MAMA. Very well remembered. What state was King Joram in at this time?

MARY. He had come to Jezreel to be healed of wounds given him in a battle with Hazael, King of Syria. So, Mama, Hazael had begun already to plague Israel?

MAMA. Did not God say he would, my dear? But a strange circumstance struck me in what you just read. Joram came home to be cured to Jezreel and not Samaria, where the Kings of Israel usually lived. I wonder why, Mary?

MARY. Mama, I do think I can guess.

MAMA. Let me see if you can.

MARY. Because of Naboth the Jezreelite; and

you know, God said, Ahab's blood should be shed there, and "dogs eat Jezebel in Jezreel." I dare say God sent them to live there on purpose !

MAMA. At least, my dear, none but an omniscient God could have known they would, by deserting Samaria, unconsciously fulfil his awful words. Where does it say Joram met Jehu ?

MARY. In the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. The very place, Mama ! I was right.

MAMA. But who was with Joram, my dear ; and a partaker in his ruin ?

MARY. Ahaziah, King of Judah, Mama ; he had come down to see him because he was sick.

MAMA. Was he a good person, and one whose misfortune we have reason to think undeserved ?

MARY. Oh, no ! it says in the end of the last chapter, that "he walked in the ways of Ahab ;" so you know, Mama, it was no wonder if he came to the same end.

MAMA. Very well. And what *was* the wretched end of Joram ?

MARY. Jehu shot him right through the body with an arrow, and ordered him to be thrown into "the plat of Naboth ;" for he remembered God laying this burden upon Ahab his father, when he and another captain were riding behind him. So far, Mama, Jehu seems to have minded and obeyed God.

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; in all that concerned vengeance, he was, from natural temper, but too ready an agent ! Many people, in our day, when indulging a persecuting spirit, flatter themselves, like Jehu, it is all “ zeal for the Lord ;” but, like him, they come short when their obedience is put to a less congenial test ? How did Ahaziah share the fate of Joram ; and why ? Let us look once more into Chronicles. What says the xxii. chapter, verse 3d ?

MARY. “ His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.” Oh ! Mama, how different from you !

MAMA. I hope so, my dear ; but let us remember who “ made me to differ ” from this wicked sister of Ahab ! And what does it say the counsel ended in ?

MARY. In his destruction ; and so it did, for he was killed too : and it says, “ the destruction of Ahaziah was of God, by coming to see Joram.”

MAMA. Yes, Mary, the old story of “ evil communication ;”—but, indeed, here the two sinful kings seem to have been fit company for each other. But what catastrophe have we next still more fatal and memorable ?

MARY. Mama, the death of wicked Jezebel, How could she think at such a time of painting

her face and tiring her head? "What is "tiring," Mama?

MAMA. The same as attiring, my dear, or dressing, as we call it. Pride and vanity almost always go along with other sins; and, I suppose, she thought to blind and dazzle Jehu with her jewels and splendour. But "pride" in her went truly (as the wise Solomon says) "before a fall." By her ill-judged taunts she hastened her own doom, and provoked Jehu to take exactly that sort of vengeance which God had predicted! What was the manner of her death?

MARY. Mama, she was thrown out of a window by her very own servants; and Jehu rode over her! How shocking!

MAMA. Not more so than what followed, my dear. What remained of her when he sent to have her buried?

MARY. Only "her skull and feet, and the palms of her hands;" all the rest had been "eaten by dogs," just as Elijah had said. This is quite a frightful story, Mama.

MAMA. Yes, my dear, and a solemn warning to all females! When we see how far impiety, and cruelty, and pride, could harden and change the nature of woman; should we not all pray to God to enable us to take warning—to resist the "beginnings of evil," and to let our

“adorning” not be like unhappy Jezebel’s—the “outward plaiting of hair, or wearing of gold, or putting on apparel; but the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price?”—We will discuss but shortly the painful details of Jehu’s farther massacres of the doomed family of Ahab, in the second chapter of to-day’s lesson; which I made you read, to enable us to dismiss the subject altogether. But let us remark, that, however a knowledge of God’s designs of vengeance might excuse *Jehu’s* cruelty, the base treachery of the nobles of Israel, in cutting off the heads of seventy innocent children, who were intrusted to their care, to be brought up, admits of no palliation. Jehu might require the sacrifice from regard to God and His word, but they evidently complied from the abject “fear of man,” and, like Judas, and all betrayers of innocent blood, it shall one day “be required at their hands.” Whom did Jehu next exterminate, when he had made an end of the family of Ahab?

MARY. The brethren of Ahaziah, Mama; who were going down, fearing no danger, to see the poor princes whose heads were cut off.

MAMA. This seems hard, but they had no business there; or rather (to return to the root of all the evil), but for the sinful marriage which made

them cousins to Ahab, they would not have been involved in his destruction. What was Jehu's next act of wholesome severity? though nothing, not even his "zeal for the Lord," of which he was so proud, could excuse the treacherous lie by which he got all his intended victims into the snare?

MARY. Mama, he pretended he would worship Baal more than Ahab had done; and proclaimed a "solemn assembly" for him. That could never be right.

MAMA. No, my dear, it was very wrong. We know who is the "father of all lies," even of those which profess to have a good object; and God, who had enabled Jehu openly to annihilate two whole royal families, could not need the aid of a base stratagem to put idolatrous priests in his power. However, like many other bad actions of men, it was permitted, to serve God's purpose, in the total destruction of all the priests of Baal, and final abolition of his worship in Israel. But now comes the test of Jehu's sincerity in all this rage against idolatry. Did *he* with a perfect heart follow God, and God alone?

MARY. No, Mama; he unaccountably still worshipped the golden calves.

MAMA. Not unaccountably, my dear. In the first place, there is no relic of disobedience in

any human heart which may not be fully and fatally "accounted for" by the depravity of our nature ; and, in the next, Jehu and other tolerable kings of Israel adhered to this particular idolatry for a very simple political reason. If they had abolished it, the people must at once have gone up to worship at Jerusalem ; the fear of which you know first made Jeroboam set his calves up at all. Man is as selfish as well as a sinful creature, and those sins where his interest is concerned will ever be the most difficult to shake off ! How did God revenge this affront, though he graciously took notice of and rewarded the more praiseworthy parts of Jehu's conduct ?

MARY. It says, "In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short ; and Hazael smote them in all the coast of Israel."

MAMA. Yes ; and you remember in how cruel and dreadful a manner. This was no light punishment, and a fresh instance of God's raising up wicked men for scourges to each other.

This has been a sad history of bloodshed and retribution, my dear Mary ; but if it makes us "stand in awe and sin not," we shall not have shuddered at it in vain ! "Knowing" (as it has made us do), "the terrors of the Lord," even in temporal visitations, shall they not "persuade" us to "flee from the wrath to come," and the hor-

rors of that "second death," to which all the carnage and waste of life in this chapter are as a drop to the ocean, or as time compared to eternity ?

MORNING TWENTY-FIRST.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapters xi. and xii.

MAMA. My dear Mary, I think we have to blush for, nay, to shudder over, such wicked female characters! No sooner have we seen Jezebel's monstrous wickedness receive its signal punishment, than a fiend in woman's shape, more unnatural still, arises to shock and appal us. What says the first verse of our chapter of Athaliah? Who was she?

MARY. The daughter of Omri, king of Israel, and mother of Ahaziah, Mama; the same, you know, who gave him bad advice to his destruction.

MAMA. Well might she be an evil counsellor, Mary, when her own heart was so "desperately wicked!" What atrocity did this disgrace to womanhood commit, at a time when most mothers would have been bewailing the untimely death of their son?

MARY. She "arose and destroyed all the seed-royal."

MAMA. What do you understand by the term "seed," for it is variously used in Scripture?

MARY. I suppose it must mean all the king's children.

MAMA. Yes, and probably all who were related to him. But this we can only know by inference, and from what follows in other verses; because "seed," in the Bible (where it is often applied to Christ), frequently means a single individual. Thus the "seed of the woman," who was to "bruise the serpent's head," we know to be the One only Son of God; and the same of that "seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the world were to be blessed." When we meet with the expression, we must always find out from the context (or rest of the passage), whether it means *one* (as in those I have quoted), or *many*, as it evidently does here. Was no one saved out of this general massacre?

MARY. Yes, Mama, one dear little child, Josiah; his good aunt saved him. I am glad there are some good women mentioned in the Bible, as well as bad ones!

MAMA. So there are in the world, Mary, thank God! And while a few unfeminine specimens of our nature make themselves conspicuous by shameless wickedness, there are many, praised be His name! in the quiet walks of life who silently (like

Jehosheba) perform the most meritorious and kindly actions. Where did she hide her nephew and his nurse, my dear ?

MARY. In a bed-chamber, Mama ; and then it says " he was with her in the house of the Lord six years." How could that be ? Surely there were no bed-chambers in a church ; or how could she hide a child there without being seen ?

MAMA. We must resort for information on these points to our old friend the Chronicles. What says the end of the 22d Chapter about Jehosheba ; to whom was she married ?

MARY. She was wife to Jehoiada, the priest.

MAMA. Ah ! that clears up the whole mystery. None but the priests *could* have lived in God's house ; but the Temple of Jerusalem included within its precincts lodging for a great number of them, and of course for the High Priest, which Jehoiada was. We might have puzzled ourselves long enough to find out how Jehosheba had access to the temple, but for this one little word of her being the High Priest's wife. We had better perhaps pursue the history of infant Joash in the Chronicles, where it differs only in being somewhat fuller than in the corresponding chapter of Kings. What happened when the child was seven years old ?

MARY. Mama, Jehoiada began to gather toge-

ther captains, and Levites, and fathers of the congregation, to get them to proclaim Joash king.

MAMA. But, by-the-by, we are forgetting,—who had reigned all this time ?

MARY. Athaliah, Mama. I suppose this was the reason why she put all her grandchildren to death.

MAMA. Exactly. So far will the lust of dominion, which our Lord calls the “pride of life,” overcome even natural affection ! And did Jehoiada’s wise schemes for bringing about the young king’s exaltation prosper ?

MARY. Perfectly, Mama ; I suppose God made them do so.

MAMA. Why do you conclude this ?

MARY. Because I dare say God would not have had any high priest but a good man, and I am sure his wife was a good woman ; and, you know, the thing itself was right. Was it not, Mama ?

MAMA. Very right, Mary, and so are you, my dear. You begin to reason and reflect just as I would wish you to do. God does not *always*, it is true, give success even to the most praiseworthy designs ; but here it pleased Him that the result should redound to his own glory, and the confusion of a wicked tyrant. What do you think must have been Athaliah’s feelings (after paying so dear for a crown) to find it placed on the brow

of an innocent child, who must have appeared to her guilty eyes almost as a ghost from the grave come to rebuke her ?

MARY. Mama, she rent her clothes and cried " Treason !"

MAMA. Do you know what treason is ?

MARY. Not exactly.

MAMA. It means, in general, offences against kings or governments. We call attempts on the lives of monarchs *high* treason. I remark a little circumstance, Mary, as you read, which we have omitted to notice. How did Jehoiada provide weapons for the Levites and other unarmed people, who were assembled in the temple to guard the young king ?

MARY. He took the spears, and bucklers, and shields, which had been King David's.

MAMA. How came they into the temple ?

MARY. David had dedicated them, Mama ; for I remember, among other bad things of Rehoboam, he took away the golden ones, and put others of brass in their place.

MAMA. That was wrong of him, but they did not the less serve their purpose now ; nor was it less remarkable that David's pious gratitude should thus contribute to the defence of his little descendant, whom Jehoiada was setting up expressly " because the Lord had said a son of David should

reign!" But, to return to Athaliah, What was her deplorable end?

MARY. She was taken "without the ranges," and killed with the sword.

MAMA. Why was she taken beyond the temple?

MARY. Because, Mama, I suppose God would not approve of bloodshed in his house.

MAMA. No, Mary; doubtless not. You know he would not even let pious David be its builder, because he was a "man of war and blood;" and He who said "My house shall be a house of prayer," could never approve of its being a slaughter-house. What step proved the gratitude of the young king and his guardians for this signal deliverance?

MARY. Jehoiada made a covenant between the king and all the people that they should serve God; "and all the people went and broke down Baal's house, and his altars and images, and slew Mattan his priest before the altar."

MAMA. This was open and manly vindication of God's honour, and not mean treachery like Jehu's! But how singular that, nearly about the same time, both nations should abolish that particular idolatry! It looks as if the same "jealous God" had resolved to make a "full end" of this long-tolerated usurper! But we must feel inte-

rested in the little king. How long did he continue to please God?

MARY. "All the days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him."

MAMA. Ah! Mary! you see the inestimable advantages of faithful counsellors to inexperienced youth! Had Rehoboam minded such he would never have lost ten tribes; and had Jehoiada's counsels been remembered when he was gone, the "latter end" of Joash might have been as blessed as we see his beginning to have been. Our chapter says the "high places were not taken away;" and this seems quite inconsistent with the firmness of Jehoiada, and his *genuine* (not pretended) zeal for the Lord. Let us see in Chronicles if this really took place in that good man's lifetime.

MARY. No, no, Mama, you are quite right. He lived to a great age, an hundred and thirty years old; but it was not till he died that these bad things happened.

MAMA. And how did they happen?

MARY. "The princes of Judah came and made obeisance to Joash, and he hearkened to them."

MAMA. Oh! the old story of flattery, I suppose! and they were probably idle young men like Rehoboam's companions.

MARY. They were worse than idle, Mama; for

they "left the house of God, and served groves and idols, and wrath came upon Judah for this trespass."

MAMA. Dear, dear! what a falling off! After all we read in our chapter of the king's pious anxiety to repair the house and keep up the worship of the true God! Was there no "faithful witness" (like Elijah or Elisha) to stem this torrent of wickedness, and stand up on the "Lord's side?"

MARY. O! yes, Mama. Zechariah, the son of good Jehoiada, stood up and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you."

MAMA. And had this solemn warning its proper effect?

MARY. No, quite the reverse; for these wicked people "stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord."

MAMA. Oh, Mary, Mary! What is that you are telling me? Such a tissue of wickedness from beginning to end! And by not only the connivance, but "commandment" of the once amiable, interesting Joash! It is enough to make every mother pray, and pray devoutly, that, when she is gone, her child whom (like Jehoiada) she has "in-

structed" may never be so far forsaken of God. I can hardly tell over the sins one short verse or two comprises. Contempt of God's prophet—black ingratitude to the memory of Jehoiada—murder of the foulest kind, and perpetrated in the very sanctuary! Oh, Mary, do you not shudder at the enumeration? Do you remember how emphatically our Lord alludes to this shocking transaction?

MARY. No, Mama, I did not know it was mentioned in the New Testament.

MAMA. What severe sentence did Christ pass upon "His generation," that is, the people of his own times? I will repeat it to you: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth—from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar!" Though this is generally thought to refer to another of the name, it may be well applied here, from our Lord's coupling with the fratricide of Cain, this horrible action; which was, indeed, little less in Joash, considering what a father Jehoiada had been to him, at the risk of his own life. But the death by stoning, of this fearless servant of God, for telling the truth to his countrymen, brings to my mind a similar case in the New Testament. Who was the first martyr, my dear?

MARY. Stephen, Mama. He was "stoned," just like Zechariah; only it was for preaching Christ.

MAMA. Yes, my dear, that was the still more illustrious truth he laid down his life in delivering. But let me see if you can tell the remarkable difference made by this knowledge of Christ, between his last words and those of his fellow-martyr. What did Zechariah say when he died?

MARY. "The Lord look upon it, and require it."

MAMA. Not an unnatural wish, Mary, in one who had but seldom heard of "loving his enemies," and was familiar with God's ways of vengeance. But how did the Christian martyr shew the triumph of Gospel principles in *his* expiring prayer? What was it?

MARY. Mama, I forget.

MAMA. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;"—words never to be forgotten, Mary, and only to be exceeded by those of Him who said on the cross, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!" Whom did God make to "require" literally upon Joash and his evil counselors the murder of his servant?

MARY. The host of Syria came that very year and destroyed all the princes from among the people.

MAMA. Ah! you see the persons who revived

idol worship met their destruction from a heathen king! And why were the Syrians successful "with a very small host?"

MARY. Because Joash and his people had forsaken God.

MAMA. What King of Syria executed this vengeance?

MARY. Hazael, Mama; and Joash sent him all the hallowed things of God's house to go away; but he was no better for it, for he was left in "sore diseases," like Jehoram; and his own servants conspired against him, "for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest." This looks as if he killed more than one—and I am sure that was enough! I am not in the least sorry for him, Mama; though, when we began reading to-day, and he was a nice little innocent child, I felt as if he could never be wicked!

MAMA. So we could all feel, Mary, when we look on some beloved and apparently sinless cherub! But the greatest villains on record were once harmless, sportive children, which must make the soul of every mother "rejoice with trembling;" especially when she learns from Solomon, that "folly is bound up in the heart of a child;" and sees in the case of Joash, the nursling of virtuous Jehosheba, become an idolater, a murderer, and an object of God's vengeance!

MORNING TWENTY-SECOND.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapters xiii. and xiv.

MAMA. I have again, my dear Mary, combined two chapters into one lesson, from their containing the history of two sovereigns, contemporary with, and opposed to, each other ; and also, perhaps, because (as all veins of a precious mine are not equally rich in gold) they seemed less fertile than some previous and succeeding ones, in edifying matter. But we shall never find a single chapter of Holy Writ barren and unprofitable ; and, as you read, I discerned gleams of spiritual light, “ shining as in a dark place,” through the apparently uninteresting record. What King of Israel have we first to consider ?

MARY. Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu.

MAMA. Was he more thorough and uniform in his obedience than his father ?

MARY. No, just the same. “ He followed the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin.”

MAMA. How we are haunted, Mary, by that

ominous phrase, through every chapter of this book ! I am sure it has heightened *my* fear of setting a bad example, and incurring that awful threat of our Lord, "Woe be unto him by whom the offence cometh ! It were better a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depths of the sea !" What fresh sorrows did the continued " offence " of the golden calves bring upon devoted Israel ?

MARY. God delivered them into the hand of Hazael, and of Benhadad his son, all their days.

MAMA. And what at length procured them some respite ?

MARY. The prayer of Jehoahaz, Mama. " He besought the Lord, and he gave Israel a saviour."

MAMA. My dear, nothing in the whole Bible is so astonishing as God's readiness to listen to the worst sinners, if they " turn to him " ever so little ; unless it be their returning (like Jehoahaz) when the danger is past, to their idols and their sins ! To what deplorable condition of weakness was Israel at this time reduced, and by its own iniquities, remember ?

MARY. Mama, Jehoahaz had but " fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen."

MAMA. Just look into 1st chapter 2d Chroni-

cles, and tell me how many Solomon had, before an angry God "began to cut Israel short?"

MARY. Oh! Mama, "A thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen."

MAMA. Ay, Mary, just (even allowing for the separation of the little kingdom of Judah) about a thousand times as many of both! Such is the prosperity God can give, and can take away! To what does the chapter liken the abject condition of Israel?

MARY. To "dust made by threshing," Mama; so often had the Syrians beat them.

MAMA. Who succeeded Jehoahaz in the kingdom?

MARY. His son, Jehoash.

MAMA. Are you not struck with so many bad kings dying peaceably in their beds, one after another, and their sons succeeding? What did this fulfil?

MARY. God's promise to Jehu, Mama, that "because he had executed God's work in cutting off the house of Ahab—his children of the fourth generation should sit on the throne of Israel."

MAMA. Very well remembered, Mary, I was sure it could not be for their own merits! Was Jehoahaz "better than his fathers?"

MARY. Not a bit, Mama, as to the golden calves; but I think he must have had some good in

him, because he wept over Elisha when he saw him dying, and cried "Oh! my father, my father!"

MAMA. I fear there was something selfish in his sorrow. What did he call the prophet besides?

MARY. "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

MAMA. This seems to imply that his chief value for him was as a temporal defender, not a teacher or spiritual guide. This was like the Jews with our Lord. If he would have taken up arms and led them to battle, instead of preaching the Kingdom of God, they would have followed him (as they afterwards did the "false Christs" of whom he warned them) with all their hearts. What parting token of kindness and power did the prophet confer on the King?

MARY. "He put his hands on the King's hands," while he shot with a bow and arrows; and told him it was the "arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria."

MAMA. Do you remember any other holy man whose "hands" were made instrumental in procuring victory for the Israelites?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. I am just reminded of one. Moses, during a battle with the Amalekites in the wilderness, held up his hands in prayer, and always,

as he let them fall from weariness, Amalek prevailed, till, at last Aaron and Hur held them up for him on every side. I have often thought this was meant as an encouragement to *perseverance* in supplication. We have just the same moral in what follows *here*. What did the prophet next bid the King do?

MARY. "Smite upon the ground" with the arrows: "and he smote thrice, and stayed."

MAMA. And what would have happened had he done it oftener?

MARY. He would have smitten Syria till it was consumed; but now he was only to do it three times. But he could not *know* this, Mama!

MAMA. No, my dear; but had there not been some want, either of faith or energy in him, a simple omission would not have exposed him to reproof. We are *all* given to smite or knock too seldom and feebly at the door of God's mercy, and not as if we fully believed it would "be opened unto us." What says our Lord respecting importunity in prayer?

MARY. I don't remember.

MAMA. Who came, Mary, often to a judge, saying, "Avenge me of mine adversary?"

MARY. Oh! I know, a poor widow.

MAMA. And did he do it at first?

MARY. No, Mama ; but when she plagued him he did.

MAMA. And how does our Lord apply this ? I will tell you. " If even this unjust judge complied with the request of the importunate widow, shall not God listen to his own elect, which cry unto him day and night ? " " Day and night," mind, Mary ; not now and then. And what does the Gospel indeed tell us was the end for which he spoke the parable ? " That men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint." If Jehoash had not " fainted," or stayed, as it is here called, the deliverance of Israel would have been complete. But tell me (before entering on the miracle which comes between) how God fulfilled his promise of *partial* victory to Jehoash ?

MARY. Mama, " he took again the cities which Hazael had taken from his father by war ; three times did he beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel ? "

MAMA. Just as Elisha had said ! But we come now to a most wonderful miracle, which has no parallel in the history of the world, performed by that prophet's very inanimate remains. What happened to the dead body hastily cast into the sepulchre of Elisha ?

MARY. When it touched his bones, " the dead man stood up on his feet."

MAMA. A most astonishing exertion of Divine power truly; and one which, unless we knew more of the special occasion which drew it forth, we cannot adequately explain. Doubtless there was some blasphemer to be silenced, or humble soul to be converted by this display of miraculous power. But let us improve it to our own instruction. If touching the mere "dry bones" of a deceased man of God, could revive a corpse, and recall a departed spirit, How should our souls derive new life from daily contact with that far more precious and imperishable "sure word of prophecy" which he and others have left behind them? And so it has often been, my dear child. Once only a dead body "stood on its feet," in the sepulchre of Elisha; but, Mary, many are the unbelievers "dead in trespasses and sins," whom a careful study of the prophetic writings (those standing miracles of God) has made to "pass from death unto life." Well might our Lord say of them, "If ye believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would ye believe though one rose from the dead."—We come now to take (in the 14th chapter) a hasty survey of the King of Judah, whose wars with Jehoash, and the latter's curious answer to his message (couched in the parabolical language of the East) induced me to

couple them together. Whose son was Amaziah?

MARY. The son of Joash, Mama. "He did according to all things that his father had done."

MAMA. That must mean his errors in religion, for we read of no act so monstrous as the stoning of Zechariah, by his father's command. His first act indeed shewed, that, though vindictive (as all men were before the blessed precepts of Christianity), he did not push vengeance to causeless malignity. Whom did he spare, when he punished the murderers of his father?

MARY. Their innocent children, Mama; and he seems to have done it out of respect for the law of Moses.

MAMA. Whom did he conquer, and slay to the number of ten thousand?

MARY. The Edomites, Mama.

MAMA. And whom did I tell you they were?

MARY. Descendants of Esau. Was he wrong in killing them?

MAMA. Cruel, certainly; though it does not appear that God *now* retained any favour for that degenerate race. But I'll tell you what was wrong. Look into 2d Chronicles, 25th chapter, verse 14, and see what he brought out of Edom, and just after slaughtering the very people they could not defend!

MARY. Oh, Mama! how foolish, as well as wicked! He took their gods, and set them up to be his, and bowed down before them!

MAMA. And how did he treat the prophet that set his folly before him?

MARY. He bade him "forbear, lest he should be smitten."

MAMA. And did the prophet hold his peace from fear of man?

MARY. No, no; but because he saw the king was hardened, and knew from it that God had determined to destroy him.

MAMA. Yes, my dear. God had said of him, as of Ephraim, "He is joined to his idols; let him alone!" Awful, but simple words! equivalent to perdition here and hereafter! What happened directly upon this?

MARY. It says the king "took advice;" How odd? when he had just rejected it.

MAMA. Ay, Mary; but this suited better with his pride and evil passions. What did he do upon it?

MARY. He sent to ask the king of Israel to let them "see each other in the face." There was nothing out of the way in that, Mama; they were both kings.

MAMA. But, my dear, this was to be no friendly meeting, like that of Ahab and Jehoshaphat.

It meant a trial of strength in battle. And how did Judah come off?

MARY. "It was put to the worse before Israel, and fled every man to his tent;" and the king himself was taken.

MAMA. And why had Amaziah persisted in this rash attack, in spite of Jehoash's striking warning, in the fable of the Thistle and the Cedar of Lebanon?

MARY. "It came of the Lord, because of the gods of Edom."

MAMA. Yes, my dear; those whom God means to destroy, he first leaves to themselves. Amaziah was "puffed up" with his success against Edom; whereas if he had seen "as God seeth," he would have mourned its consequences in sackcloth and ashes! What was this ill-advised king's end?

MARY. A conspiracy was made against him in Jerusalem.

MAMA. And when? The Chronicles will tell you.

MARY. "At the time he did turn away from following the Lord." He must have been a good man who wrote the Chronicles, Mama; he always tells us the moral of every story.


MAMA. Yes, my dear; I have often made the remark: and it is one great cause of the delightful variety which (along with the most perfect

unity of design, pervades the Bible, that it has pleased the Spirit who over-ruled the whole, to leave his human instruments, to follow in their respective narratives, their own natural style and disposition. This is peculiarly the case with the four Evangelists ; and while we daily bless God that the Gospel as recorded by them is essentially " One,"—what Scripture reader would not grieve to lose the delightful individuality stamped upon each,—by the simplicity of Matthew, the conciseness of Mark, the polished fulness of Luke, and, above all, by the exquisite respect and tenderness with which the minutest saying of his great Master has been treasured for the Christian's consolation, by the " disciple whom Jesus loved ?" It has pleased God to make the Bible not one, but a collection of volumes, by persons of the most different characters and professions ; and why ? That in it the same endless shades of human disposition might find congenial nourishment, and that the testimony borne to God's truth by his own book, should correspond in fulness and variety with that daily borne to his power by the wonders of creation.

MORNING TWENTY-THIRD.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter xv.

MAMA. This chapter, my dear Mary, furnishes a strong corroboration of the remark which we made at the close of our last lesson, viz. the usefulness and edification of a reference to corresponding parts of Scripture, in quest of farther light and improvement. The beginning of our chapter to-day contains a short account of that king Azariah (or Uzziah, as he is elsewhere called), who, I told you some days ago, was struck with leprosy, and on that account, deprived of the rights of sovereignty, and caused to dwell in a “several (or separate) house to the day of his death.” But if we had not had the Chronicles to assist us, we should never have known the cause of this grievous infliction, nor the striking particulars connected with it. Let us seek them in their usual place—that ample, and, as we observed, *pious* record of the successors of David; of whom we may, in general, remark, that, though very fallible mortals, they



seem seldom, if ever, to have been given over to such unmixed wickedness as the monarchs of Israel,—a difference we can only attribute to their never losing sight entirely of the true God and his worship. What says the 26th chapter, 2d Chronicles, of King Uzziah.

MARY. Mama, all the people took him and made him king at sixteen years old, in the room of his father Amaziah, and he did right like him.

MAMA. Perfectly right, Mary?

MARY. No, Mama. You know Amaziah kept up high places, and set up the gods of Edom. Uzziah did nothing so bad as that.

MAMA. How long did he prosper, and why?

MARY. "As long as he sought the Lord," in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God. Could this be good Zechariah who was stoned?

MAMA. No, my dear; because, from the length of the former reign, he must have been killed before Uzziah was born. But God seldom leaves himself "without a witness," in any age or country; and while some persecute his servants, others, praise be to His name! listen to and profit by their counsel. What measure of prosperity did God bestow on Uzziah?

MARY. Very great indeed, Mama: "God helped him marvellously" against all his enemies.

and he had "three hundred and seven thousand men that made war with mighty power."

MAMA. Stop, Mary, and consider the contrast between this number and the depressed state of idolatrous Israel, after God began to "cut it short" for its sins. How many soldiers had Jehoahaz left?

MARY. Only ten thousand footmen, Mama; just a handful, compared to Uzziah's.

MAMA. And yet remember, my dear, he reigned over *ten* tribes, and Uzziah only over *two*. Such difference can God's favour and countenance make between nations! Was Uzziah prosperous in nothing but war?

MARY. Oh yes, Mama. He "built towers in the desert, and digged wells, for he had much cattle; husbandmen also, and vine-dressers in the mountains, for he loved husbandry."

MAMA. Indeed! It is seldom a warlike prince cares much about such useful matters. Do you know what the "towers" had to do with husbandry?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. No, Mary? Why did I tell you the master, in the parable of the vineyard, built one?

MARY. Oh, I remember! to guard it, Mama.

MAMA. Yes, my dear; and should we not be

thankful that *we* sit “under our own vine and fig-tree” now, “with none to make us afraid?” We know not what it means to plough and dig with arms in our hands, as in some countries; and with Philistines, and Moabites, and Syrians, coming unawares upon us, to kill and carry us away captive! Do you know why “digging wells” is always mentioned in Scripture as so good a work?

MARY. No; unless because water was scarce, as you told me, in Judea.

MAMA. Very scarce; and in some parts only to be procured by wells of enormous depth, and great expense. Do you remember the frequent quarrels in Genesis about “wells,” between Abraham and Isaac and their neighbours? They surprised you at the time, I know. And do you recollect a still more remarkable proof of the preciousness of water in those primitive times, when we read of both Rebekah (a rich man’s daughter), and the wife of Moses (whose father was high priest, or prince of Midian), drawing water themselves, and not without a *struggle* with stranger shepherds, for their father’s flocks?—But to return to Uzziah, and to an often-repeated question, Did all this prosperity prove for the health of either his body or soul?

MARY. No, Mama. It says here, “when he

was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord."

MAMA. How, my dear?

MARY. He went into the Temple to burn incense himself.

MAMA. Had he any right to do so?

MARY. No, Mama, none.

MAMA. Whose exclusive business was it?

MARY. The priests'; you told me so when we read about Jeroboam. You know *his* hand withered for the same thing.

MAMA. Very well remembered; only he was combining idolatry with sacrilege.

MARY. What is sacrilege, Mama?

MAMA. Any offence against the holiness of God's house or service. Did the priests withstand Uzziah?

MARY. Oh! yes, and told him how wrong and foolish it was; and "that it should not be for his honour from the Lord."

MAMA. Excellent advice, and most true! How was the latter part of it fulfilled?

MARY. Mama, while he was "wroth with the priests, and had the censer in his hand,"..... what is a censer?

MAMA. A small metal brazier pierced with holes, which being filled with incense, is swung about to this day in catholic churches.

MARY. But what is incense ?

MAMA. Ah ! I was just waiting to see if you would ask me. It is a fragrant compound of drugs and spices, which, laid upon hot embers and swung about, gives out a strong perfume. God himself ordered the offering of it in the Law of Moses. There was an altar on purpose, called the "Altar of Incense ;" and, while the sacrifices offered foreshewed Christ's atonement, the incense is thought to have typified the intercession of "Him, who ever liveth to make intercession for us." While on this subject, my dear (and an awful one it is !) of God's "jealousy" in all that concerns his own worship and service, we must remember it was not only upon sacrilegious kings he has testified his displeasure, and avenged his sanctuary. Priests themselves, of the holy race of Aaron, have transgressed, and that fatally, by violating his own express appointments. Do you not recollect being very sorry indeed for Aaron on one occasion ?

MARY. Was it when he had made the golden calf, Mama ?

MAMA. No, my dear ; at the time I mean it was not his own sin he deplored. What did his two sons do ?

MARY. Oh ! Nadab and Abihu ! I remember now ; they were killed by fire from God ; and I

was sorry for Aaron, because he was not allowed to weep, or make any lamentation for them.

MAMA. And why was he thus to suppress all the usual tokens of mourning?

MARY. I don't remember.

MAMA. Because, my dear, it would ill have become God's high priest, to question His justice in cutting off two presumptuous young men, who, in the face of his express command, and with every advantage of instruction, dared to offer "strange (that is unhallowed) fire upon His altar." What fire should they have used in their censers?

MARY. Holy fire, I suppose, Mama. You said there *was* a holy fire, when we read about Elijah and the priests of Baal.

MAMA. Yes, my dear; and whence had it come?

MARY. From Heaven.

MAMA. Ay! there is the root of the whole matter, and the reason of God's awful visitation, viz. the offering any earthly substitute (here represented for our instruction under the symbol of unconsecrated fire,) to Him, in place of the one pure and heaven-descended sacrifice, which He has alone authorized *us* to present, or promised *He* will accept! Let us bear this in mind, Mary. God will not, even in our day of simple and spiritual

worship, take "strange fire" at our hands. Our incense, if to reach His throne at all, must be laid on and mingled with that sacrifice "of a sweet-smelling savour," which can alone purify and fit it for the footstool of God! Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire, from among the congregation of Israel, for forgetting this; how much more awful will it be to hear our Lord say to those who have chosen to stand or fall by their own unsanctified oblations, "I never knew you! Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" What judgment overtook Uzziah in the very midst of *his* transgression?

MARY. "The priests looked upon him, and behold he was leprous in the forehead, and they thrust him out; yea, he himself hastened to go out, because the Lord had smitten him."

MAMA. Well might one, held too "unclean" to associate with his fellow-mortals, be excluded from the sanctuary of God! an offended God especially! Let us hope Uzziah had leisure to repent of his presumption in a saving manner, during his long solitary seclusion from the cares of government. Perhaps it was in ultimate mercy that he was thus checked in a career of success and arrogance, which might otherwise have incurably hardened his heart. Temporal chastisements for sin have been thus blessed to many. David, we

know, ascribed to them his highest spiritual attainments. "Before I was afflicted," says he, "I went astray, but now have I kept thy word."

Having followed Uzziah to his punishment, in the Chronicles, we must return to our chapter, and to its melancholy catalogue of bad kings of Israel, and their short unfortunate reigns. Who was Zachariah?

MARY. The son of Jeroboam, Mama.

MAMA. Was he still of the family of Jehu?

MARY. Yes, Mama; and the fourth and last of those children God said should sit on his throne. It mentions so here.

MAMA. What was his character?

MARY. Just like the rest, Mama.

MAMA. Was his end of the same peaceful kind?

MARY. No.

MAMA. And why so; do you think?

MARY. Because I suppose God had done with the family.

MAMA. Just so; and therefore he allowed Shal-lum to conspire and slay Zachariah. "Had he peace" (as Jezebel said to Jehu,) who slew his master?"

MARY. Oh! no; he only reigned a month, and then Menahem killed him.

MAMA. A very appropriate fate. And was he

just what we should expect from a murderer and conspirator?

MARY. Yes! he seems to have been very similar in disposition to Hazael, and did the same shocking things.

MAMA. Who first invaded Israel in this reign?

MARY. The king of Assyria, Mama; but Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver, and he turned back.

MAMA. Yes, for a little while, my dear; but you see, in the very same chapter, he came back again, and took a number of cities. These sinful expedients of bribing away invaders (either as Menahem did here, by oppressive taxes on their subjects, or, more criminally still, by robbing God's house of His dedicated treasures, instead of propitiating Him who could alone have defended them), never did the kings who practised them any permanent good. Henceforward Assyria never ceased harassing Israel, till at length it fulfilled God's vengeance, and swept it away altogether. Its monarch is indeed thus addressed by the Lord of Hosts in Isaiah, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger! I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge; to take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets." We shall see this

threatening ere long dreadfully fulfilled ; in the mean time we can gather, from even the sickening record of murders and conspiracies which closes our chapter, that a people so degenerate and distracted were ripe for judgment and captivity. You see the King of Assyria had already begun to carry away the inhabitants of several cities.

Think what a course of iniquity it must have been that provoked God to remove ten of his chosen tribes for ever from the country He himself had given them, and to make them exiles and outcasts (even from their brethren) as they are at this day ! When we hear of these sweeping judgments, let us " not be high-minded, but fear ;" and lay to heart the warning addressed by St. Paul to the Christians of his day : " If God spared not the natural branches (that is Israel, his own chosen and peculiar vine), take heed lest he also spare not thee !"

MORNING TWENTY-FOURTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter xvi.

MAMA. We have, in this chapter to-day, Mary, and still more strongly in the corresponding chapter of Chronicles, to which we shall have occasion to refer,—a confirmation of my yesterday's remark, respecting the impolicy as well as impiety of the compacts with heathen princes, entered into by the kings of Judah and Israel, to purchase temporary security; instead of imploring from the God of their fathers the succour and protection he was ever ready, when thus "besought," to afford. That Israel, which had, as we observed, been long "joined to idols," and therefore forsaken of the Lord, should resort to such expedients, is less wonderful; but that the descendants of David, spared and upheld for his very sake, and not entirely forgetful of Jehovah (though they insulted him by setting up rival altars), should in their distress have recourse to "the arm of flesh," might surprise us, did we not consi-

der that such is often the *practical* impiety of many of the professed servants of God in our own days. We have the same, nay greater encouragement than even the Jews had, to “call upon the Lord, in the day of trouble” or difficulty; yet it is seldom till all else fails,—till the “reed on which we leaned” has pierced us, and “the princes and men’s sons,” in whom we trusted, have deceived us, and the spiritual enemy whom we bribed with the “things that are God’s,” has returned with “seven other spirits more wicked than himself,” to annoy us; that we at length feel that there is a “lie in our right hand,” and “lay our help (where God himself hath laid it) “upon One who is mighty to save!” Was Ahaz, the King of Judah, of whom we here read, better or worse than his predecessors?

MARY. Worse, Mama; “he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.”

MAMA. Have you ever thought, Mary, while reading this oft-repeated phrase, what an awful thing it is for a people, or race, or individual, to have their “ways” thus sufficient, when barely mentioned, to express all sorts and degrees of desperate wickedness? We never hear now of the “ways” of the kings of Israel, without having idolatry, impiety, and murder, and a whole catalogue of enormities, before us. The *reason* we

must learn from an Apostle. "They did not choose to retain God in their knowledge, so he gave them over to work all kinds of uncleanness with greediness!"—in short, to what is elsewhere expressed by the awful term, "a reprobate mind." This seems to have been the case with their imitator Ahaz. What was the first special "abomination of the heathen" chargeable upon him?

MARY. "He made his son to pass through the fire."¹

MAMA. Do you understand the import of these horrible words?

MARY. Not exactly, Mama.

MAMA. Look into the 28th chapter of Chronicles, and see what it says.

MARY. It says, "he burnt his children in the fire." How dreadful! Were they really burnt to death?

MAMA. Yes, my dear, and in the most shocking manner. The idol to whom these horrible sacrifices were chiefly offered was "Moloch," into the arms of whose huge heated brazen figure deluded parents cast their innocent children, while with shouts and the noise of musical instruments their cries were drowned in the ears of men. But they ascended not the less to their "Father who is in Heaven." Let us hear how God says.

in Jeremiah, they shall be avenged in this very valley of Hinnom mentioned here. "And they have built the high places of Tophet" (so called from the drums beat by the priests to stifle the children's cries,) "which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. *Therefore*, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called the valley of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter; for they shall bury in Tophet till there be no place. And the carcasses of this people shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth, and none shall fray them away." Did the "abomination of Hinnom" satisfy Ahaz?

MARY. No; he made molten images for Baalim, and sacrificed and burnt incense on the hills, and under every green tree.

MAMA. And what was his immediate punishment?

MARY. "God delivered him into the hand of the King of Syria."

MAMA. But what enemy nearer home was also permitted to distress him?

MARY. Pekah, king of Israel, Mama. You know God sometimes lets bad men plague each other. "He slew an hundred and twenty thou-

sand men in one day," "because they had forsaken the God of their fathers."

MAMA. And did he not also make many captives?

MARY. Yes; two hundred thousand women and children, and much spoil; and carried them to Samaria.

MAMA. How the tables are turned, Mary! The three hundred thousand souls of Judah who, under Uzziah, so lately were "marvellously helped," are now utterly discomfited by the comparative handfuls of Israel! Did the latter keep their brethren in captivity?

MARY. No; Oded the prophet would not let them. He said unto them, "God who was wroth with Judah hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage which reacheth up to heaven. But are there not with *you*, even you, sins against the Lord your God?"

MAMA. What should *we* learn, Mary, from the prophet's indignant reproof?

MARY. I don't know, Mama. We do not take our brethren captive now.

MAMA. No, Mary; but we are often harsh and severe towards them, (more so by far than God "who even in judgment remembereth mercy"); and too apt to forget how unfit our own numerous sins render us for being censurers of others. When

we are inclined to visit to the uttermost any transgression of our neighbours, (you know, under the Gospel, we are all brethren), let us call to mind the simple question of Obed, "Are there not with you, even you, sins against the Lord your God?" By what striking parable did Christ enforce the same forbearance?

MARY. I don't remember.

MAMA. Who owed his Lord ten thousand talents, and had nothing to pay?

MARY. A certain king's servant, Mama; and his good master forgave him the debt.

MAMA. And did he immediately "go and do likewise?"

MARY. Oh! dear no; for he took a fellow servant that owed him a few pence "by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest." But his master was very angry, and "delivered this wicked servant to the tormentors, till he should pay the uttermost farthing."

MAMA. Very well remembered indeed! Now you have only, with God's blessing, to apply it, Mary, whenever you feel the least inclined to be revengeful or uncharitable. Did the elders of Israel take amiss the prophet's rebuke?

MARY. No, Mama; they behaved very well. They fed and clothed all the poor prisoners with the spoils they had taken, and "anointed them,

and carried the feeble among them upon asses, and brought them home to Jericho."

MAMA. This was conduct quite worthy of Christians, and an example to many calling themselves such. But, as you read, I was put forcibly in mind, by the latter parts of this act of charity, of one mentioned in the Gospel, as performed on the same spot, and by a descendant of these very men of Samaria.

MARY. Oh! yes; I know, the good Samaritan's! How strange! *He* "poured oil upon the poor wounded man, too, and set him on his own beast!"

MAMA. And where was he going at the time, Mary, do you remember?

MARY. From Jerusalem to Jericho, Mama; the very spot, too!

MAMA. You see, Mary, kindness towards enemies, though *rare* till Gospel times, and rather an exception than a rule, was not wholly unknown. Let us be careful not to disgrace *our* profession by opposite conduct. What further misfortunes overtook Ahaz?

MARY. The Philistines and Edomites came and carried away captives; every body did as they liked against Judah now.

MAMA. And why so?

MARY. "The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz."

MAMA. And did misfortune humble and convert him?

MARY. No: it says, "In the time of his distress he did trespass yet more against the Lord. This is that king Ahaz!"

MAMA. The last expression is a strong Hebrew term of reproach; and shews the sense entertained of his wickedness. How did he farther transgress?

MARY. "He took away a portion out of the house of the Lord," and gave it to the king of Assyria to come up and save and help him. "But he helped him not."

MAMA. No, my dear. David, who acted so differently, might have taught his degenerate descendant a better lesson? What says that pious monarch? "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. The nations compassed me about, but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them." But, Mary, what far worse consequences than want of worldly success attended the league which Ahaz made with Assyria?

MARY. Mama, it says in Chronicles, "he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that smote him, and he said, Because the gods of the kings

of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him.

MAMA. Of that there can be no doubt. But how came he to bring gods from Damascus? What had he to do there?

MARY. Our chapter tells us he went there to meet the king of Assyria, who had taken Damascus, and carried away the people of it captive, and killed their king.

MAMA. So I thought, Mary, as you read it before. It was then mere gratuitous folly in Ahaz to adopt gods so evidently powerless to save their own worshippers. I don't think our chapter says any thing of his bringing home gods.

MARY. No, Mama, only the pattern of an altar; but he had no business to make one like theirs you know, when he had a brazen altar of the Lord's at home.

MAMA. Certainly not, my dear. And what did he do with it, after he had transferred the daily sacrifices to his new heathen one?

MARY. He kept it to "inquire by."

MAMA. God might well answer him as he did the Jews: "I will not for this be inquired of by you." Many among us think to share the benefits and consolations of religion, while dethroning God from the altar of our hearts, and burning incense

cense there to a thousand lying vanities ! But we have in Isaiah (who was first called to the prophetic office in the reign of Uzziah, and prophesied under several of his successors) a striking instance of God's readiness to be "yet inquired of," even by sinners, and "found of them that sought him not." Indignant at the ferocious execution by Israel of his wrath upon Judah, the merciful God of David seems to have been moved with compassion for his people ; and Ahas was desired, through the prophet, "to ask a sign" (or miracle) "of the Lord."

MARY. What *did* he ask, Mama ? I am sure the Jews, in our Saviour's time, were always asking "a sign !"

MAMA. Yes, Mary ; but the very same unbelief which made them ask one (in the face of innumerable daily wonders) induced Ahas to decline one. He pretended a dislike to "tempt God ;" but this could only be a pretext in one who had full authority to tax Jehovah's power to the uttermost, by asking it "either in the depths or in the height above !" To prove as it were God's indignation at his lukewarmness, and extension of his despised mercy to the whole human race, it was at this time that He was graciously pleased to hold forth, to generations unborn, that "precious sign" afterwards so remarkably fulfilled

n our Lord Jesus Christ. "Behold a virgin shall conceive and shall bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel;" which you know, Mary, and ought always to remember, the Evangelist tells us, signifies "God with us."

MORNING TWENTY-FIFTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter xvii.

MAMA. This chapter, my dear Mary, contains within its compass a full and fearful enumeration of those enormities which at length totally alienated God from his people Israel, and provoked him to remove them out of his sight; and of the execution of his judicial and long-threatened sentence, by his appointed minister the king of Assyria. What did I tell you he was expressly called by Isaiah?

MARY. The “Rod of God’s anger.”

MAMA. Yes, my dear; and, again, “In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired;” namely, by them beyond the river—the king of Assyria. (And still more explicitly—how could such warnings be disregarded?)—“Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah, that go softly;”—meaning the pure service of the true God—“now, therefore, the Lord bringeth upon them the waters of the river,

strong and many—even the king of Assyria.”—In reading these contemporary prophecies, which you shall do shortly, and with more effect from your previous knowledge of the history to which many of them refer, it is most striking to see how the prophet's own mind is cheered and illumined amid the impending destruction of his nation, by the gradual unfolding of the more universal and spiritual salvation of his God ! The chapter of Isaiah I quoted to you yesterday, contained (at this very season of darkness and tribulation) the first explicit revelation of Christ, as the incarnate God ; and it is in the midst of the accumulated horrors which attend God's vengeance that the prophet bursts forth in that magnificent strain we have so often admired together, as the sublimest the Scripture can afford : “ For unto us a child is born, and unto us a son is given ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace ! ” Though, probably, Isaiah had not, like us, the privilege of fully understanding and appreciating his own sublime predictions ; yet, no doubt, promises so “ great and glorious ” supported and consoled him under the apostasy and rejection of his countrymen. On them many a pious heart rested during the long and frequent captivities : and to Daniel they were,

as "by the waters of Babylon he sat and wept," when the "fulness of time" drew near, more distinctly and plainly revealed. But we must leave this pleasing digression, and accompany, with trembling acquiescence in its justice, devoted Israel to her final doom! In whose reign was it consummated?

MARY. In Hosea's, Mama. Not quite so wicked a king as those before him; this seems strange.

MAMA. Not if we take into the account that, having survived the destruction of his kingdom, it is possible he was thus brought to acknowledge in his prison the greatness and justice of God; while his hardened predecessors, we know, "died in their sins." Why was he deposed and imprisoned by the king of Assyria?

MARY. Because, Mama, like all the rest, he gave him presents at one time, and would not at another.

MAMA. Was it a mere present he withheld? Does it not say, "he became his servant?"

MARY. Yes.

MAMA. Then they were on a different sort of footing. What did "Mesha, king of Moab," withhold from Jehoram?

MARY. His "tribute," Mama.

MAMA. Yes, or acknowledgment of sovereign-

ty, and so did Hosea here. But the king of Assyria had another cause of displeasure.

MARY. It says, "he found conspiracy in Hosea, because he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt."

MAMA. Truly was it said by one of the prophets, "The reed of Egypt, on which they have leaned, shall pierce them;" and, by another, "Wo to them that go down to Egypt for help!" for, you see, like other unlawful alliances, it hastened Hosea's destruction. We come now, Mary, to the fearful causes of his ruin; let us number and impress them on our memories, before proceeding to their merited punishment. What stands first on the list?

MARY. Ingratitude to God, Mama, "who had brought them out of Egypt."

MAMA. And very properly; as the breach of the "first and great commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," leads infallibly to every other. What is the next step?

MARY. "Walking in the statutes of the heathen, whom God had cast out before them."

MAMA. Folly, as well as wickedness, as we have often remarked. And in what manner were these offences first introduced?

MARY. "Secretly," Mama. "The children

of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God."

MAMA. Ah! this is what made the Lord, by the mouth of Isaiah, say it was a "hypocritical nation;" against whom he would bring the king of Assyria! Hypocrisy is odious in God's sight, but in the Jews it walked hand in hand with open transgression. Did they not ere long come to "glory in their shame?"

MARY. Oh! yes; they "set up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree; for they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, ye shall not do this thing."

MAMA. Worse and worse, Mary. Idolatry, coupled with disobedience! And was all this iniquity unchecked by reproof or warning?

MARY. Oh! no. "God testified against Israel and Judah, by all the prophets, saying, Turn ye from your evil way. But they hardened their necks, like their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God."

MAMA. We have here obduracy and unbelief to add to our fearful catalogue.

MARY. It is not near done, Mama; "They rejected the statutes God gave them, and his covenant with their fathers."

MAMA. Stop, my dear, what is a covenant? I don't think I ever asked you.

MARY. It is an agreement, Mama. Is it not?

MAMA. Yes, my dear, between two or more parties, and upon certain conditions. Who were the "parties" to the one mentioned here?

MARY. God and the Jews, Mama.

MAMA. And had they kept *their* part of the agreement, which was to serve God?

MARY. Oh! no, no; not in the least.

MAMA. Well, you see the God of infinite justice might long ere now have availed himself of it to withdraw his covenanted protection. But he is also a God of infinite mercy; and he bore with them, according to his own beautiful maxim in the Gospel, not "seven times only, but until seventy times seven!" At length, they wearied and provoked him. Well might Isaiah ask them, "Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?" Have you ever thought, Mary, what these awful words imply? what it is to exhaust the treasures of infinite patience, and infinite compassion, and, as it were, force from the reluctant hand of Omnipotence, the long-sealed "vials of wrath!" Oh! let it never be so with us! We, too, are under a covenant; but though one of grace and mercy, and its conditions fulfilled, yet, in order to be interested in it, we are required to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; but easy as this seems to be, we are just as

unwilling to believe the Gospel as the stubborn Jews were to keep the Law! We do not, like them, make molten images and groves; but we "follow after vanity, and become vain," in ways little less offensive to God. We do not "make our sons and our daughters to pass through the fire to Moloch;" but hundreds of parents, more merciless still, devote them, by neglect and ill example, to Satan. In short, there is not one gross, carnal act of disobedience among the rebellious house of Israel, which may not, alas! find a spiritual prototype among professing Christians! These things, Mary, were written for our instruction. If, as St. Paul says, "He that despised Moses' law (or the old covenant) died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" What was the end of the wretched kingdom of Israel?

MARY. "God removed it out of his sight."

MAMA. Yes, and out of ours, Mary, to this day. For while the dispersed remnant of Judah are kept, by his providence, in miraculous isolation from the nations among whom they dwell; and ready, as it were, for their promised restora-

tion, Israel, if restored at all, can only be so by an exertion of power equal to that which will call the materials composing our mortal bodies from the elements into which they have been resolved. With what mongrel race of men and gods did Jehovah allow his desecrated land to be overrun ; when the fence of his vineyard was for ever broken down, and it was given to the ravenous beasts for a prey ?

MARY. The king of Assyria sent all sorts of heathen people to live at Samaria.

MAMA. And did they flourish on the ruins of desolated Israel ?

MARY. Not at first, Mama. Because they did not fear God, he sent lions among them.

MAMA. How was this evil remedied ?

MARY. A priest of Israel came to teach them how to fear the Lord.

MAMA. Well ! this was always some gain to ignorant heathens ! Did they keep the worship thus acquired pure ?

MARY. Oh ! no ; it says, "they feared the Lord, and served their own gods !" How foolish !

MAMA. Even *you*, as a Christian *child*, know it to be so ; but it was the practice of the wisest nations of antiquity. The Romans you are so fond of, often adopted the gods of conquered nations in addition to their own. But, Mary, I fear

some among us know something of the evil of a divided heart !” What does our Lord say about “serving God and mammon ?”

MARY. That no man can do both.

MAMA. True, Mary ; but the very caution infers that there are many who *try* ! Nothing, in fact, is more common than trying, like the mongrel Samaritans, how many rivals the “God of the land” will tolerate near his throne. But what says the Bible, “Thou shalt have *some other* gods beside me ; for I am a “jealous God.” He is so in truth, Mary ; and He who sent “lions” to assert his supremacy in the forsaken land of Israel, will be sure to testify, in some way or other, his displeasure at being dethroned in our hearts. At all events, when the great day of visitation shall come, that Lord, “who discerneth them that are his,” will say, and I fear to many (who, like the Samaritans, serve him and their “graven images” together)—as Elisha said to idolatrous Jehoram, “What have I to do with thee ? Get thee to the idols before whom thou hast bowed down.”

MORNING TWENTY-SIXTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter xviii. 1–12.

MAMA. My dear Mary, are you not absolutely relieved and delighted, as I have been, to read, amid so much of a humbling and distressing nature as we have lately waded through, the history of a really pious and sincere, though necessarily fallible, servant of the true God? This revival of genuine spiritual religion in the dark places of long-benighted Judah, looks as if (when just on the eve of for ever abandoning the reprobate tribes of Israel to their fate,) the merciful God of David had indeed turned on *his* descendant the “light of his gracious countenance,” and justified his own ways to men, by a signal proof of the superior fitness for his favour of upright Hezekiah. We do not read in the whole Old Testament of a more decided change in the religious state of a people,—of so evident “a passing from death unto life,” as in the case of Judah under this young prince, who, in spite of the worst example a parent could set before him,—shewed himself a worthy heir of David, and faithful wor-

shipper of Jehovah, at the early age of twenty-five. Whose son was he, my dear?

MARY. The son of "*that king Ahaz,*" so called, for being more wicked than others.

MAMA. True, Mary. It must have been a happy natural disposition, and highly assisted by grace, which enabled *his* son "to do all that was right in the sight of the Lord." What was the first proof of devotion to the good cause mentioned here?

MARY. He removed the high places, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the serpent that Moses had made,—“for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense unto it.”

MAMA. Ah! Mary; and what serpent is alluded to here.

MARY. The brazen one, I suppose; I don't know any other he made.

MAMA. I am very glad, indeed, you know that; but I shall be still better pleased if you remember its history and application. Why did Moses make it, Mary?

MARY. Because the people were bit with fiery serpents, and many died.

MAMA. Could the making and setting up of a brazen serpent cure such deadly wounds?

MARY. Yes, Mama; but it was because God had bid Moses do it.

MAMA. Very right, my child. All means appointed by God, from the least to the greatest, are alike infallible. Did all the suffering multitude (who, you must remember, *were* sufferers from their own sinful murmurings), "look at the serpent of brass and live?"

MARY. I suppose so, Mama; they could never be so foolish as to refuse so easy a thing!

MAMA. Remember Naaman the Syrian, Mary, who would not "wash and be clean." But we must come nearer home. What was "lifting up" the serpent in the wilderness a type of?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. Mary, who was "lifted up" on the Cross, "that all men through him should have everlasting life?"

MARY. Oh! Mama, I *might* have known that; I think I have heard it before.

MAMA. I dare say you have; it is a common allusion with preachers. But "hearers of the word," Mary, are not necessarily "doers" also. Do all who have "heard of Christ," and his efficacy for salvation, implicitly believe, and look to him and live?

MARY. I used to think every body did, Mama, in a Christian country, but somehow I don't feel so sure, since you talked to me.

MAMA. Alas ! Mary, we can feel " sure " of nobody, least of all of ourselves ! but one thing is certain. If we do not " look to Christ " in faith here, we must look on him in terror hereafter ! We have been led a great way by the mention of the brazen serpent ; but, if this great truth has been illustrated or enforced, it will not have been lost labour. What does our chapter go on to say of Hezekiah ?

MARY. " That there was none like him among the kings of Judah, before or after. For he *clave* unto the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses."

MAMA. An excellent character, truly ! but for its full development we must consult the Chronicles, the pious author of which, like a captive escaped from a noisome dungeon, revels in the congenial atmosphere of this pure and spiritual reign. What does he say, in the 29th chapter, was its very first act ?

MARY. Opening the doors of the house of the Lord, Mama.

MAMA. And what excellent advice did this godly young king give the priests and Levites, whom he had gathered, to revive the neglected service of his God ?

MARY. He bade them sanctify themselves, and "carry forth the filthiness out of the house of the Lord."

MAMA. Let us take this lesson home also, Mary. What had the house of God become in our Lord's days?

MARY. "A den of thieves," Mama; how shocking!

MAMA. True; and what unclean things did he also expel from it?

MARY. Money-changers, Mama, and "people that sold doves!" What in the world brought *them* there?

MAMA. My dear, though very wrong, it was natural enough. Do you remember what our Saviour's mother offered when her child was presented in the temple?

MARY. There is a picture of it in your Bible; she gave a pair of "turtle doves,"—you told me at the time that Moses ordered it, but I forgot.

MAMA. Well! now you will cease to wonder that "doves" should be sold in the temple. But this is not what concerns *us*. If *we* were as ready as Hezekiah to cast out from our hearts all the impure desires, and angry passions, and sordid cares, that unfit it to be the "temple of the Holy Ghost;" think you not that he would come oftener to dwell there, and sanctify it to himself, as Heze-

kiah strove to do to the desecrated temple of Jerusalem? Another part of that wise monarch's admonition also may profit us, "My sons be not now negligent!" To "do the work of the Lord deceitfully," is not to do it at all. But it was far otherwise with Hezekiah, and those whom he "stirred up." We see in the immediate and hearty revival of the service, sacrifices and praises of God, according to the Law of Moses, and practice of holy David,—how much one devoted and sincere servant of God can by influence and example accomplish! Hezekiah, in a few short months, did away the effects of whole reigns of iniquity and irreligion. There is a most delightful account, in the following chapter of Chronicles, (which pray read through, my dear, before you lay aside your Bible), of a solemn Passover celebrated by Hezekiah, after years of disuse and forgetfulness. And one charming circumstance of this feast of gratitude is, that it was a feast of love also; and that it "pleased the king and the congregation" to send letters to their brethren of Ephraim and Manasseh (remember it took place before God had utterly destroyed Israel), to ask them to join in the holy celebration. Just look at the 10th verse of the 30th chapter, and see how this brotherly message was received.

MARY. "So the posts passed from city to city

through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them." How shameful, Mama.

MAMA. But did *all* the Israelites equally despise the invitation?

MARY. No, no; I was too hasty. It says, "divers of Ashur, and Manasseh, and Zebulun, humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem."

MAMA. So it is, let us hope, with "divers" in our own days; however a "world that lieth in wickedness may condemn the Gospel message. But does not this opportunity afforded by God, to a "few names in Israel," to escape, by repentance from the calamities just overhanging their nation,—savour much of his usual kindness? "The Lord knoweth them that are his," it is true, without any such outward separation; but this opportune call to worship in Judah, probably aroused some heedless Israelites slumbering on the verge of ruin, and proved the means of their safety from the flood which overwhelmed their unhappy country. For the hasty imperfect preparation of such "fleeers from the wrath to come," there was a beautiful provision made by the pious young king. See if you can tell me, from the account in the 30th chapter, what it was.

MARY. (*After reading it.*) The Levites sprink-

led them, Mama, with the blood of the Passover, and the king prayed for them, saying, "The Lord God pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the Sanctuary."

MAMA. This was acting in a spirit of truly Christian humility and love ; and that "blood of sprinkling" (of which I told you the pascal lamb's was but a type), was no doubt effectual and accepted of God. Indeed, I think it says so here.

MARY. Yes, Mama ; the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and "healed the people." It must have been a delightful time, Mama ; such singing and praising God, "and offering peace-offerings, and making confession to the Lord their God !" It says every body rejoiced, "and there was great joy in Jerusalem."

MAMA. These visible tokens, my dear, of peace and harmony and rejoicing were indeed doubly delightful, after the scenes of anarchy and bloodshed with which they had long been conversant. But what more important consequences still ensued ?

MARY. "When the priests, the Levites, rose up and blessed the people, their voice was heard, and their prayers came up to His holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven."

MAMA. Just the natural and infallible order of God's dealings with his people, my dear child. We read first of repentance,—next of sanctification,—then, as a necessary consequence, of joy and comfort,—and now comes acceptance and salvation to crown the whole! And what were the permanent and blessed effects of this “renewed heart” on king and people? Observe it was *then*, and not till then (which made me leave our chapter to resort hither) that the zeal against idolatry, and destruction of heathen altars, mentioned in Kings, took place. This is also the legitimate order of things. The desire to “turn unto the Lord,” does, it is true, generally precede conversion; but it is seldom that the power to do so effectually is possessed, till, like Hezekiah and his sanctified people, we have “tasted of the goodness of the Lord.”—How different in spirit (though the same in its effects) was the obedience of love, which sent a ransomed people to overthrow the idols they had blindly served, from the fierce and *partial* reforms and intolerant rage of a persecuting Jehu! We find, from a continued perusal of Chronicles, that the service of God was efficiently restored and adhered to by king and people. What says our own chapter of Hezekiah's reward?

MARY. "The Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth."

MAMA. And what immediately follows, as a contrast?

MARY. The account of the miserable destruction of Israel and its king.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; just what the opposite conduct of the two nations naturally led to. But alas, for poor human nature! reverses almost equally humiliating, though, praised be God, not final, await us in the history of Hezekiah. But I really have not heart to enter on ~~this~~ ^{these} now, after so delightfully expatiating on those days of blessedness, when, like Job, "the candle of the Lord shone on his head." To keep distinct, therefore, these two remarkable and equally instructive portions of Hezekiah's life, we will defer till to-morrow all mention of his temporary errors, and his ample repentance of them; as well as the manner in which, being, like a greater than himself, made *perfect* (I mean, of course, in the sense in which it is said of David and Aza,) by suffering, "he glorified God in the day of his adversity, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."—We have had much to-day of purely spiritual instruction; let it sink deep, my dear, and cleanse our hearts, as the piety of Hezekiah did the earthly tabernacle.

MORNING TWENTY-SEVENTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter xviii. 13.

MAMA. I hope, Mary, indeed I can have no doubt, that the particulars we read yesterday in the Scriptures, of the early piety, and “zeal for the Lord,” of Hezekiah, have made you follow with deep interest and attention the circumstances recorded here, of the blasphemous taunts of the king of Assyria’s messengers against the Lord of Hosts, and the triumphant manner in which it pleased God at once to vindicate his glory, and deliver his believing servant. But remember, Mary, “spring not from the ground.” It is either “of the Lord,” and then his servants, who are “exercised thereby,” can acquiesce with cheerful submission in his fatherly appointment; as it was with Hezekiah, and is most frequently with ourselves, “We are verily guilty concerning the thing” from which, as naturally as blood streams from a polluted fountain, our sorrows and disquietudes arise. What step did He-

zekiah take with regard to the king of Assyria, which is utterly unworthy of his character as a prince "greatly beloved of God?"

MARY. Mama, he was afraid of him, and begged his pardon; for, you know, it says he had "rebelled against him;" was this wrong?

MAMA. My dear, that depends on the nature of the rebellion. Was Judah the natural servant or tributary of the king of Assyria?

MARY. No. I suppose it was only because the king of Assyria was strongest.

MAMA. Just so. And since God had graciously strengthened Hezekiah to throw off the disgraceful heathen yoke, he offended Him far more than he could possibly do the Assyrian tyrant, when he meanly crouched to the latter, and laid at his feet every thing he had; yea, even the gold and silver of God's house, to avert his anger. It is both melancholy and singular, that, with so much piety, Hezekiah should at this time have combined so weak a faith! Did his base expedient prosper?

MARY. No, Mama; you know it never did. The king just sent another army greater than before.

MAMA. By what step did he preface his attack on Jerusalem?

MARY. The chief men of Assyria came and

talked with the chief men of Judah, and told them how vain and foolish it would be to hold out against their master.

MAMA. Ay ! and what led them to think that ?

MARY. Because the gods of the other nations round had not been able to deliver them out of his hand.

MAMA. What was this doing to the only living and true God, Mary ?

MARY. Affronting him, Mama, by making him like idols of wood and stone.

MAMA. Very well indeed, my dear. And is this a comparison he ever fails to resent ?

MARY. No. That was the very reason why Hezekiah hoped God would help him "to reprove the words he had heard against himself."

MAMA. What reason had Hezekiah to expect such deliverance besides God's own vindication ? Had he repented of his unhallowed compact ?

MARY. Oh yes ; he "rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord."

MAMA. Just what David, his ancestor, used to do on similar occasions ; and what, in a figurative and spiritual manner, every true penitent must do now. And whose joint prayers did the broken-hearted king implore ?

MARY. Isaiah's Mama ; " he bade him lift up his prayer for the remnant that was left."

MAMA. And did the prophet " speak comfortably" in the name of his God to the humble suppliant ?

MARY. Yes ; he told him not to be afraid ; for God would send a " blast and a rumour," which should carry the king of Assyria home to his own land, and he was to fall by the sword there.

MAMA. What similar instance of a panic from the Lord did we read of lately ?

MARY. The Syrians fleeing away from before Samaria, because God had made them " hear a noise."

MAMA. Very well remembered. The wicked are often cowardly, and guilt has slumbering terrors, which one breath from the Lord can swell into a howling tempest !—Was the king of Assyria's alarm *wholly* causeless, like the Syrians ?

MARY. No : " he had heard say that the king of Ethiopia was come out to fight against him."

MAMA. And what did he do before reluctantly giving up for a time his designs on Jerusalem ?

MARY. He sent a letter to Hezekiah repeating all his former blasphemies.

MAMA. And what was *his* first impulse on receiving it ?

MARY. "He went up to the house of God, and spread it before the Lord."

MAMA. Oh Mary, what an edifying lesson is here? If, when troubles come upon us from the causeless wrath of man, or our own unadvised conduct, we would thus, in humility and penitence, "spread them before the Lord;" how quickly, in the former case, would he become our Champion, and, in the latter, our reconciled Father. How dignified, too, as well as pious, was the conduct of Hezekiah, who, committing his cause to God, "answered not a word" to the bitter revilings of the Assyrians. Who, my dear Mary, gave *us* the example of like forbearance, under reproach and blasphemy?

MARY. Our blessed Lord, Mama. You know "when he was mocked he reviled not again."

MAMA. No, my dear; and when idly interrogated by a heathen governor, "he answered him not a word." "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Were this oftener remembered, we should hear less of that "railing for railing" among Christians, which we see Hezekiah disdained to practise towards a blasphemous heathen; and which (in a mysterious but striking passage of Jude), it is said, Michael, the archangel, *durst* not, by the angelic courtesies of heaven, use against Satan himself; but context-

ed himself with saying mildly, "the Lord rebuke thee." It is a beautiful feature in Hezekiah's noble prayer, that he keeps the glory of God chiefly in view throughout; and prays for deliverance, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that He is the Lord, even he only." Was this prayer accepted?

MARY. Yes; Isaiah told him God had "heard it."

MAMA. And then the indignant prophet breaks out in His name, in a strain of animated scorn such as it only becomes Omnipotence to use of those whom the Almighty "hath in derision." What does he tell Sennacherib was the only spring of those mighty successes which had so elated the miserable worm who was made their instrument?

MARY. He says, "God had brought it to pass, that he should lay fenced cities in ruinous heaps."

MAMA. True, Mary. It was with him, as with another heathen ruler, whom our Lord thus addressed: "Thou couldst have no power against me at all, unless it were given thee from above." And how was God to manifest his absolute command over the Assyrian "rod of his anger?"

MARY. Because of his rage against him, God was to "put his hook in his nose, and his bridle

in his lips, and turn him back by the way that he came."

MAMA. Most expressive language to denote the irresistible, though unseen, power of Him who ruleth not only the actions but hearts of men, and "turneth them as he will!" But a "hook" and a "bridle" are terms indicative of forcible control and passive subjection. They are the means with which Job represents the Almighty as taming leviathan and the brute monsters of the great deep. *We* also must be "drawn" of the Father, Mary; else our Saviour says, "we cannot come unto him." Is it by such harsh methods as those which he employs upon his enemies?

MARY. Oh no, Mama; God loves us too well.

MAMA. Yes, my child; and therefore it is with "cords of love," and "bands of a man,"—with all the sympathies of earth, and all the compassions of heaven, that he strives to win us to himself. Oh let us not resist and strive against Him. Did the king of Assyria succeed in defeating the counsel of God?

MARY. Oh, no. He must surely have wished he had never offended and blasphemed Him, when the angel of the Lord smote "an hundred and eighty-five thousand men in his camp."

MAMA. Regret he might have felt, my dear, but certainly not repentance. They are, alas! very different things! Had the latter been the case, he would not have been worshipping, as we find just after, "in the house of Nisroch his god." There are hearts, like Pharaoh's and this Sennacherib's, so hardened, as to be inaccessible even to miracles. How did God remarkably both avenge his honour, and fulfil his word upon him?

MARY. Just as he had said, "he fell by the sword."

MAMA. And where, Mary?

MARY. In his idol temple.

MAMA. And by whose hand?

MARY. Shocking, Mama! his own two sons killed him.

MAMA. This was predicted by Isaiah also, my dear. "They that came forth of his own bowels were to slay him,"—an event at once unnatural and improbable. It was a fate worthy of one of the greatest blasphemers on record, and not related as mere matter of wonder and amazement, but of salutary awe. Let us learn, from this day's lesson, humble but unshaken confidence in God. If "He be with us," and he is with all "who put their trust in him," we need "not fear

what man can do unto us !” And let the fate of Sennacherib make us tremble to entertain low or unworthy thoughts of the Almighty, to undervalue his mercy, or underrate his power,—or (the infallible consequence of both), to undergo his terrors !

MORNING TWENTY-EIGHTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapter xx. and xxi.

MAMA. My dear Mary, I once thought of concluding our last lesson with the remarkable event contained in the first of this day's chapters; but I thought it deserved a larger share of the attention and leisure, which (not to break in upon the history of Josiah,) we must otherwise have exclusively and painfully devoted to the heart-sickening reign of Manasseh. What event, in the common course of nature, threatened to cut short the life of the miraculously defended Hezekiah?

MARY. Mama, "he fell sick unto death."

MAMA. When you read these simple words, Mary, do you ever reflect it is what we must *all* do sooner or later? But how did he know it was "unto death?" Few of us believe it till our last hour comes.

MARY. Isaiah told him plainly, Mama, from God.

MAMA. It would be well for professing Christians, when they are dying, my dear, if those about

them did not often, from mistaken tenderness, suppress this awful truth. If they *are* prepared it cannot dismay them ; if they are *not*, it ought to do so, ere it be too late. With what salutary advice did the prophet accompany his warning ?

MARY. "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live."

MAMA. Mary, it were well if these words were not reserved, either by others or ourselves, for a deathbed. "To die and not live," is the fate of us all ; and, unless we had an assurance none can have, that it will not be to-night, should not "our house be *ever* set in order ?" We do not enter upon, or even propose, the shortest journey, without some arrangement of our worldly concerns ; yet many are content to quit time for eternity, without one account balanced for either ! Some foolish people seem to think "setting their house in order" will accelerate their death,—young people think it time enough, old people dislike the thought,—the summons comes, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee ;" and "the fool" (for such he is, of whatever age, who has not foreseen it) goes an undischarged bankrupt to his great account. Let it not be so with us, Mary ! You as yet share with your namesake in the Gospel the privilege of being not "cumbered with the world." You have the more leisure to

“ set in order ” the little world within. Christ has told you what a child *should* be, by commanding all to be like them : Oh ! If it please Him to call you away early (like some young creatures we have read of lately), may your portion be with those of whom our Lord says, “ Of such is the kingdom of God ! ” Did Hezekiah acquiesce humbly and cheerfully, as many good people do now, in God’s appointment for him ?

MARY. No, Mama ; he prayed to live longer, and “ wept sore.” I thought he would have behaved better.

MAMA. My dear ; before we blame him, there is much to be taken into the account. The ancient Jews had not so much knowledge of a future state as we have ; and, as length of days upon earth was to them connected with God’s favour and promises, we must not wonder if it was precious in their eyes. But there is a circumstance in the prayer of Hezekiah, which still more strikingly distinguishes him from a real Christian ; what was it ?

MARY. Mama, you told me nobody should boast. Now, I think Hezekiah does it a little, and forgets how wrong he had been at times.

MAMA. Very well answered, Mary. That is precisely the spirit and temper which form the grand feature of difference between law and gos-

pel. Boasting "is indeed excluded" under both; for as perfect obedience was the standard of acceptance under the law, and as all have come short of it, so every mouth ought to be stopped from boasting as being guilty before God; and with regard to the Christian's hope in death his own performances have nothing to do; he knows that a life of sincere obedience cannot even comfort him at death; it is the finished work of Christ alone that can both comfort and save him, and he prizes it too high to dream of bringing his own works forward as any ground of merit with God. A Christian's deathbed prayer will not run like Hezekiah's, "Oh, God! let me live longer in this world, if it please thee, for the sake of the good works I have done in it;" but, "Oh, God! for me to live (if I live) may it be Christ, and to die may it be exceeding great gain, for the sake of Him who vanquished death, and took away the sting of sin!" Did God listen to Hezekiah's petition for life?

MARY. Yes, Mama; it was very good in him.

MAMA. Are we not told, Mary, that he "delighteth in mercy?" But what reason can we gather from the answer,—inclined him to be favourable? What does he call Hezekiah?

MARY. "The captain of his people."

MAMA. Ah! then I dare say his foreknowledge of their miseries under his successors, inclined God to spare their excellent ruler a little longer. And what does God style himself?

MARY. "The God of David his father."

MAMA. Then the memory of David had probably its share in the gracious grant. These, with the "prayers and tears" of one who had often laid both before his footstool, were enough, you see, to make God revoke his decree, and add fifteen years to the temporal life of the suppliant. Great encouragement surely to all who ask with the same earnestness blessings of a spiritual nature, far less precarious and dubious than a longer sojourn upon earth might prove to many of us! How soon was the king to recover?

MARY. In three days,—how quick! it was surely a miracle!

MAMA. No, my dear; there does not appear any miraculous interference in the cure itself; indeed, we are told by what simple natural means it was brought about. But did Hezekiah at once believe Isaiah?

MARY. No, Mama; how very strange! I never can understand the odd unbelief of the good people in the Bible!

MAMA. That is, my dear little girl, because

you know happily, as yet, not much of human nature. Its inconsistency may humble, but can never surprise, those who do.

MARY. Hezekiah "asked a sign," Mama, like the Jews from our Lord. Now, I don't know if he was wrong like them; but I suppose so.


MAMA. It was needless, certainly, in both cases; both had seen enough before of "the wonderful works of God;" but our surest test of the comparative spirit which prompted the request is, that in the Jews' case it was indignantly refused, and in Hezekiah's indulgently granted, by the same "searcher of hearts." It is likely Hezekiah wished it more for the conviction of others than his own; indeed, I think his answer to the prophet's option proves it. What was offered him?

MARY. Either to have the shadow go forward or back "ten degrees on the dial."

MAMA. Have you ever seen a dial?

MARY. Once I believe, Mama, in an old-fashioned garden; but I did not know what it was for.

MAMA. It is a simple ancient device (as you perceive from its being mentioned in the Bible,) for telling the time of day, by the particular point of a circle on which a shadow is cast by a thin upright plate of metal. Why did Hezekiah choose it rather to go backward?



MARY. Because it seemed more difficult.

MAMA. That was an idle childish supposition, Mary. It is justly observed by Bishop Watson, that "the machine of the universe is in the hands of God: he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole, with less trouble than either of us can stop a watch!" and if, when winding up my watch, I can just as easily put it backward as forward ten minutes, why should not the Great God the regulator of the universe cause the sun as easily to retrograde as to advance?

MARY. But, Mama, the sun does not move at all; it is we who go round.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; be thankful you know it; and it is well ever to recollect that the Sacred historian expressly relates it as a *miracle*. The Bible uses the language of description, not the language of philosophy, and the miracle must be resolved wholly unto the power of God, the sun *apparently* moves, and though we know better, yet every day we make use of the same language, when we say that the sun "rises or goes down," or when we speak of the "sun's course." The object of this miracle was of the most important and impressive nature. The sun and the moon were the two principal gods of the idolatrous heathen nations, and here the principal luminary yielded miraculous obedience to the prayer of the Prophet of

the true God, and thereby contributed to the surprise and confusion of their own worshippers. If Hezekiah thought it no "light thing" for God to "turn back" (as he had just done an earthly conqueror) that sun which He first bade go "forth as a bridegroom, to run his race," how must we exceed in our wonder and admiration the simple monarch of Judah! It is this which makes the study of astronomy so delightful—that it magnifies and exalts our ideas of God. But, Mary, did the miracle thus unnecessarily exacted ultimately benefit Hezekiah?

MARY. I don't know.

MAMA. The Chronicles tell us that it was the report of "the sign" which induced the King of Babylon to send ambassadors to Hezekiah; and our chapter informs us how indiscreetly and vain-gloriously he behaved on that occasion. Strange, Mary, that recent escape from a deathbed, and having his days *literally* (as we all have in one sense) "*numbered*," could not keep down the pride of one even tolerable human heart! What terrible threatenings did the idle display of his treasures to a heathen prince draw down on him?

MARY. That all he had, and his sons too, should one day be carried to Babylon.

MAMA. Did Hezekiah murmur at this denunciation?

MARY. No, Mama ; he must have known he had brought it on himself. He behaved better, and said, " Good is the word the Lord hath spoken." However, it was not to be in his days, else, perhaps, he would have been more grieved.

MAMA. What son of his, Mary, was soon after carried prisoner to Babylon ?

MARY. I have not heard of any as yet.

MAMA. No, my dear, because the chapter of Kings in which we have read Manasseh's history omits it. But the Chronicles tell us that he was " bound in fetters and carried to Babylon ;" and, moreover, that he repented, and afterwards was restored to his kingdom. This will be some ray of satisfaction to us amid the dark catalogue (which we must briefly allude to) of his enormities. How old was he when he succeeded ?

MARY. Only twelve Mama ; and good Hezekiah's son ! how could he be so wicked ?

MAMA. Mary, does it strike you ? He must have been born after his father's lease of life was renewed ; and if his bad dispositions shewed themselves early (as they *must* have done, for it is supposed he " sawed asunder" the prophet Isaiah in the very first year of his reign), do you not think his father had cause to loathe the life thus *prolonged* ? So sure is it that we " know not *what is* good for us, all the days of our vain life,

which we spend as a shadow!" What singular language does the Almighty use, in threatening vengeance upon Judah for Manasseh's abominations?

MARY. He was to "stretch over Judah the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, turning it upside down!"

MAMA. Homely but strong metaphors, Mary; well calculated to make an impression on a carnal people, and terribly fulfilled. Not, however, in Manasseh's days. That his deep repentance averted; while the short, though wicked reign of his son Amon, hardly afforded time; and the virtues of Josiah, we know, warded off, for a season, the "terrible day of the Lord." Let us learn from Hezekiah's history, not a vain and idle desire of life, but so to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom; not a presumptuous seeking of a "sign from Heaven," but walking humbly in the mild light of the "Sun of Righteousness," and partaking of the "healing that is under his wings."

MORNING TWENTY-NINTH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapters xxii. and xxiii.

MAMA. We have again, my dear child, in these refreshing chapters, one of those bright gleams of religious light and sunshine, which flashed at times athwart the dark spiritual horizon of Judah ere the sun of its glory became gradually, though, blessed be God, we are led to hope not finally, obscured. Its decline, as we have before remarked, was distinguished from the hopeless degeneracy of "removed" and "abandoned" Israel, by many instances of individual piety in its monarchs, and a general readiness in their people to follow their example ; though it must be acknowledged, they shewed hardly less prompt compliance with the worst "abominations" of such reprobates as Manasseh. I could not help, however, hoping, from what is said of his "filling Jerusalem with *innocent* blood from one end to another," that part of it at least must have flowed in the cause of God and his religion ; besides which, I remembered, as we should all do

men reading of general apostasy, "the seven thousand even in corrupt Israel, who had not bowed the knee to Baal," in the time of Ahab ; and whose names (though unknown to the prophet) were "written in the book of God's remembrance." Let us hope that many such escaped from the slaughters of Manasseh's earlier reer, to weep tears of joy over his repentance, and hail, almost as gladly as the wise men did the star of our Lord in the east, the early piety and promising character of Josiah. Who was he, my dear ?

MARY. The son of wicked Amon.

MAMA. And at what age did he succeed him ?

MARY. At eight years old, Mama.

MAMA. Then the short reign and life of his father was probably a blessing not only to his oppressed people, but to his innocent child ! Oh ! Mary, what a sad inversion it is of the gracious order of God's providence, when we can lawfully rejoice at the removal of a parent from his helpless offspring ! We have seen that wicked fathers do not always, thanks be to God and his grace ! make wicked sons, even by their pronounced example ; but the chances of their doing so are so fearfully great, that gratitude for pious parents can never be carried too far. To what

must we ascribe Josiah's "doing right in the eyes of the Lord," even at his tender years?

MARY. I dare say, Mama, he had a kind mother, who taught him as you do me.


MAMA. Perhaps he had, my child. But who taught her? Who put it into her head to sow in her babe's tender breast the precious seed of God's most holy word? Remember, fathers may plant, and mothers water, yea, even with tears such as mothers only shed; but it is God alone who giveth the increase! So, leaving human conjectures, however pleasing, and human instruments, however zealous and affectionate, let us ascribe to Him and His grace, whatever "good thing towards the Lord of Hosts" was found in the infant king of Judah! How did he, prompted by the Spirit of God, commence his reformation?

MARY. He set about repairing the House of God, just like Hezekiah.

MAMA. Did you remark *when* this important and praiseworthy work was begun?

MARY. In the eighteenth year of his reign; that was a long time to wait.

MAMA. Yes, Mary; but it is more to the credit of Josiah, and more decisively his own deliberate act (assisted, as we before said, by Him,



“ from whom cometh every perfect gift, ” than if it had been done during his minority, when he was, of course, like the “ heir ” mentioned by St. Paul, under “ tutors and governors.” It was at the age when (if ever) reflection banishes youthful levity, and the character developes itself for good or evil, that this young king declared himself openly for God, and took effectual measures for restoring his temple and service. But, Mary, there is an internal reformation which we all, even the best, stand hourly in need of, and yet, of whose necessity our natural ignorance is deep and total, till removed by one sole and irresistible agency ! What precious discovery was made in the course of the repairs of the temple ?

MARY. “ The book of the law of the Lord,” Mama ; Hilkiah the priest found it.

MAMA. Oh ! Mary, what a deal is conveyed in those simple words ! Think what must have been the cheerless, the benighted, the perishing, condition of God’s people, when the “ lamp to their feet, and the light to their path,” was thus fatally “ hid from their eyes ! ” Think what must have been the mistakes, the errors, the open transgressions (when thus deprived of a law) of those whom not all its promises or terrors could keep from forgetting the Lord their God ! Fancy for a moment that the Bibles in our favoured land of

light and liberty had been chiefly (as was the case of the books of Moses) confined to the possession of a few priests and elders among us, and that, even by those destined instructors of others, their very existence had long been doubted! Fancy the effect produced upon a multitude of careless sinners, living at their ease, unconscious of a broken law, and its awful penalties, should a copy of the Old Testament Scriptures,—not softened and disarmed of their terrors, you will observe, by the precious promises, and imputed righteousness of the New,—burst at once, like a thunderbolt, upon their ignorance and their iniquity! What effect, indeed, did the reading of the law produce upon even upright Josiah?

MARY. When he heard the words of the book of the law, he rent his clothes.

MAMA. Yes, Mary, in mingled grief and shame for his ignorant want of conformity to so good and holy a law. What should this make *us* feel, who have the same standard of morality more clearly revealed, enforced with sanctions so infinitely higher, and, instead of being locked up in the custody of a few, “preached to the poor among us,” by the Incarnate Son of God; and who, nevertheless, are content to remain in wilful ignorance, or yet more criminal disregard of it! Let us “rend our hearts, and not our garments,” Mary! ac-

cording to the advice of the prophet, and "turn unto the Lord our God, and it may be that he will pardon and heal us." Was this the conduct of Josiah?

MARY. Yes, Mama, he immediately sent the priests and scribes to "inquire" for him and his people of the Lord. What were they to ask, Mama?

MAMA. To ask "mercy," my dear, for those who had hitherto unwittingly transgressed, and strength to walk for the future in the ways of God's blessed book. Just what every servant of God has daily to request now, not through the narrow medium of fellow-mortals like himself (though "the effectual fervent prayer" of such appointed ministers, we are told, "availeth much,") but through the omnipotent mediation of the Son of God himself. Who was consulted upon the occasion we read of?

MARY. "Huldah the prophetess," Mama. I did not know there were prophetesses.

MAMA. Just instances sufficient, Mary, to prove that eminent female piety may be thus extraordinarily distinguished; while the whole tenor of Scripture tends to keep women humble, and to discourage their intermeddling with public instruction, or things too high for and unbecoming their sex. A woman's destined sphere, my dear

Mary, and never forget it, is that of unobtrusive piety and silent usefulness. Do you remember instances of these being eminently rewarded in the New Testament? Who was the first to receive in her arms and welcome the infant Saviour?

MARY. Old Anna, Mama; and she was a prophetess too.

MAMA. What had the tenor of her life been?

MARY. Since she lost her husband, her time had chiefly been passed in the temple praying.

MAMA. Yes, praying for that very "salvation from God," which it was her gracious reward (like holy Simeon) to see and acknowledge, before she was permitted to depart in peace. This was a mark of God's favour towards female *piety*. How did it please him to shew his approbation of *charity* in women? Mary, whom do we read of that made "coats and garments" for the poor—who was "full of alms-deeds, and good works," and was bewailed when she died accordingly?

MARY. Oh, Dorcas, Mama; and St. Peter brought her to life again.

MAMA. Let *us* bring her to life again, Mary, by reviving in ourselves the same spirit of fervent, zealous, yet unostentatious benevolence! But what did the Jewish prophetess answer when consulted by Josiah?

MARY. She bade them "tell the man that sent them" unto her, that though God was still determined to bring evil upon Judah, "even all the words of the book the king had read," yet it should not be in Josiah's day, and he should go to his grave in peace, and not see it.

MAMA. And why so, Mary? You have omitted the cause of this gracious forbearance.

MARY. Oh! did I?—because he had "humbled himself, and rent his clothes, and wept before God."

MAMA. True, Mary; but does it not say something about the state of his heart?

MARY. Yes, because it was "*tender*."

MAMA. Ah! that is what made his penitence so acceptable with "Him who looketh unto the heart," and with whom a "contrite spirit" is of great price. Was the king content with his own knowledge and that of the priests of the holy book of God?

MARY. No, Mama; he read it to "all the people, both small and great."

MAMA. Why was he specially right in so doing? What is the book called here?

MARY. The "Book of the Covenant."

MAMA. Ah! and was it binding on kings and priests only?

MARY. No ; on the whole children of Abraham.

MAMA. Yes, and highly proper in consequence to be known by them all. We might see from this case, were the absurdity even not manifest of itself, how widely those have " departed from God," who would keep the meanest of his subjects ignorant, not only of the tenor, but letter, of his blessed word. Did the people of Judah renew for themselves the " covenant" made by their fathers ?

MARY. Yes, Mama.

MAMA. And to what did it bind them ?

MARY. " To seek after the Lord, and keep his commandments, and testimonies, and statutes, with all their heart, and all their soul."

MAMA. And did they content themselves with taking on them this solemn engagement, in the presence of their God ?

MARY. No, Mama. It says, " all the people stood to the covenant."

MAMA. My dear child, this is praise of no common description. Many among us are prompt to undertake, and ready to promise, great things in the Lord's service ; but how few " hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end !" What decisive proof did Josiah and his

people give that their religious profession was sincere ?

MARY. Mama, they rooted out idolatry, and put down idolatrous priests, just as Asa and Hezekiah had done—only more thoroughly ; for the groves, and high places, and all, were destroyed, and the idols stamped to powder, just like Aaron's calf.

MAMA. What place, remarkable for its horrid rites (of which we read lately,) did they "de-file?"

MARY. "Tophet," Mama ; "which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom," that people might never burn their children there any more.

MAMA. How ancient, and consequently deep-rooted, were some of the sorts of idol-worship abolished by Josiah ?

MARY. As old as Solomon. You remember the long list we had of his "abominations," and they are mentioned again here.

MAMA. Yes ; and you see how permanent and destructive had proved the example of this once wise, and latterly infatuated, prince. But what singular act of retribution do we read of here, by which Josiah fulfilled a prediction uttered centuries before his birth ?

MARY. His burning dead men's bones upon the altar at Bethel, set up by Jeroboam ; just as the

of the prophecy. How does it run ?

MARY. " O altar, altar ! thus saith the Lord : A child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he and his priests that burn incense, and men's bones be burnt upon thee."

MAMA. A marvellous prophecy ! and very likely at the time to be fulfilled, as nothing of the utter ruin and desolation of the state and *then* flourishing kingdom of Israel, enable a monarch of Judah to overthrow and pollute the chief seat of idolatry, in a neighbouring territory ; and as it does not appear that Josiah knew any thing of the prophecy till he embarked in the pious work, his unconscious fulfilment of its very letter is rendered more striking still. To what joyful celebration was this " "

MARY. No ; he was killed in a battle with the king of Egypt. What business had he to be there ?

MAMA. None, my dear. The Chronicles indeed tell us that he was strongly dissuaded, and that in the name of the Lord, by the former from molesting him in an enterprise sanctioned by God against the king of Assyria ; but Josiah “ would not hearken ;” and his untimely death was the consequence of this unprovoked aggression. We are told that his people mourned greatly for him, and that the “ singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations even unto this day.” But a still greater honour to his memory is recorded, viz. that he was lamented by Jeremiah the prophet ; whose regrets must have been much aggravated by knowledge of the character of his contemptible successors, and the withdrawal in Josiah of the last bulwark which interposed between the devoted land of Judah and the long-impending vengeance of the Almighty. In the next two chapters we shall see its fatal accomplishment ; and if the lesson should prove a melancholy one, it cannot fail to be also instructive.—Let us gather from to-day’s the more pleasing inference, that it is in the power of individual goodness to arrest, if not avert, the temporal judgments of God. It is said in the

strong, but figurative language of Scripture, that the "Lord *could* do nothing against Sodom till righteous Lot" was in safety ; and here we see that the evil decreed against Judah and Jerusalem remained suspended, till the eyes of Josiah should be closed in peace.

MORNING THIRTIETH.

LESSON.—2 Kings, Chapters xxiv. and xxv.

MAMA. My dear Mary, is not your young heart saddened by the narrative you have just been reading of the desolation of Judah, filling up, as it were, the measure of the calamities of Israel, and fulfilling to the letter the language of Isaiah to Ahaz: "The land which thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of *both* her kings!" Is it not melancholy to see the destinies of nations, once so highly favoured by God, brought, through their own iniquities, to an untimely end, like a "tale that is told?" In whose reign did this fearful consummation take place?

MARY. Partly in Jehoiakim's.

MAMA. And who was he? You must look for his parentage in the end of the former chapter.

MARY. One of Josiah's sons, whose name Pharaoh king of Egypt changed, when he set him up in the room of his brother Jehoahaz.

MAMA. And under what conditions was he left nominal king of Judah ?

MARY. He was to pay a tribute of an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

MAMA. Have we reason to sympathize with him under this mortification ?

MARY. No, Mama ; for he was one of the wicked kings, like those we have so often heard of.

MAMA. And what fresh enemy did God in consequence permit to oppress him ?

MARY. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. And it says, the Lord sent against him bands of Chaldeans, and Syrians, and Moabites, and Ammonites, all “ to destroy Judah, as God had spoken ;” and it was chiefly for Manasseh’s “ innocent blood” that he shed.

MAMA. I am more and more convinced, Mary, that it must have been shed for the Lord, then ; for you know what we read lately in the parable of the importunate widow, about God “ avenging his elect ;” and in the Revelations the martyrs for the truth are represented as reminding him of his promise, and crying, “ How long, O Lord, holy and true ! dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ?” For the “ rest of the acts of Jehoiakim” our chapter, as usual, refers us to the Chronicles,—the writer of

which contents himself also with alluding to, without specifying his enormities. There is, however, an impious act of this king's, related elsewhere, far too shocking to be passed over in silence, and recorded (doubtless for our instruction) by an eminent contemporary. Who did we say had "mourned" for good Josiah?

MARY. Jeremiah the prophet, Mama.

MAMA. Well! as we found in Isaiah remarkable prophecies relating to former kings of Judah, it is to *him* we must look for an act of Jehoiakim's, forming a most singular contrast with the pious conduct lately observed in a similar case by Josiah. Turn to the 36th chapter of Jeremiah, and see what the prophet was to do, at the Lord's command.

MARY. He was to "write all that the Lord had spoken against Israel and Judah in a roll of a book."

MAMA. And for what merciful purpose?

MARY. In case they might possibly repent; and God might be able to forgive them.

MAMA. Oh! Mary, is it not truly said, that "to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses though we have rebelled against him," when incorrigible Judah was thus condescendingly warned? To whom did the prophet (already

imprisoned for his fearless rebuke) intrust the precious roll ?

MARY. To Baruch, the son of Neraiah, and he was to read it to the people.

MAMA. On what occasion ?

MARY. On a "fasting day."

MAMA. So you see the form of religion was still kept up even in this wicked reign. That it was a farce (on the king's part at least) we shall soon have a proof. Were the first hearers of the "roll" unmoved by it ?

MARY. No, "they were afraid, both one and another."

MAMA. So they well might, Mary ! so awful were the predictions there collected against their devoted land. But our business is with Jehoiakim. How was he affected by the reading ? Did he, like virtuous Josiah, weep and "rend his clothes ?"

MARY. Oh ! no, Mama ; the hardened wretch, as soon as it was read to him, cut the leaves with a penknife, and threw them into the fire !

MAMA. And did his impiety stop there ?

MARY. No, he wanted to take Jeremiah and Baruch to kill them, but "the Lord hid them."

MAMA. And what special denunciations against Jehoiakim was Jeremiah desired to add in re-copying the burnt volume ?

MARY. That he should have "none to sit upon the throne of David," and that his dead body should be cast out "in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost."

MAMA. Do we read anywhere how this was accomplished?

MARY. Our chapter said, he "slept with his fathers;" that means he was buried, does it not?

MAMA. Yes, but the Chronicles assign him a fate more agreeable to the infallible threatening of the Lord. He was "put in fetters" and carried to Babylon; there, dying as a miserable captive, it is more than probable his carcass was exposed to the indignities predicted by Jeremiah. But we must return to our chapter. Who succeeded Jehoiakim?

MARY. His son Jehoiachin; this hardly agrees with his "having none to sit on the throne of David" after him!

MAMA. Stay, Mary, till you learn his successor's brief reign and melancholy fate. What was the length of the former?

MARY. Ah! only "three months!"

MAMA. And what became of him then?

MARY. Oh! all happened that God had long threatened; and he was carried away to Babylon with his mother, and his wives, and his officers, and every thing he had, and all the treasures of

God's house, and the vessels of gold that silver men had dedicated.

MAMA. Do you remember when *that* was especially foretold? Who first idly shewed them to the King of Babylon?

MARY. Hezekiah, Mama; and God told him at the time how it would be when he was gone; but, like Josiah, it was not to be in his days.

MAMA. Was the nominal sovereignty over the wretched remnant of Judah quite abolished?

MARY. Not yet, Mama. An uncle of Jehoiachin's was made king, and called Zedekiah. But he was as bad as the rest, and it is said, "through the anger of the Lord he rebelled against the king of Babylon."

MAMA. This case of God in judgment abandoning to the pride of their own hearts the presumptuous and self-willed people who had forfeited his protection, occurs much more remarkably at a later period; when the Jews had incurred, by yet deeper guilt, vengeance more terrific still. At the time of that last siege of Jerusalem, of which we spoke lately, as the most bloody and calamitous on record, the very Jews who, when "under the shadow of the Most High," were ever desponding, and crouching to heathen conquerors, resisted with a stupid stubbornness, of which history affords no other example, the power

of the whole Roman empire ; just, it would seem, (as is implied here), as if God, to protract their sufferings, and make them a monument of vengeance, had judicially hardened their hearts and obscured their understandings. By whom was Jerusalem besieged now ?

MARY. By Nebuchadnezzar, Mama ; and there was a famine like the other sieges. I wonder if any mothers ate their children this time ?

MAMA. It is not so recorded, my dear ; but the prophet Jeremiah gives a full and melancholy account of the hardships in the city, and his own providential preservation from perishing by famine, or the rage of the people, whom he was in vain endeavouring to warn against fruitless resistance. What does our chapter say at length happened ?

MARY. "The city was broken up," Mama. Poor Jerusalem ! I am very sorry ! How it would have vexed David !

MAMA. The destruction, my dear, at this time, was doubtless great ; for we are told that "the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and every great man's house, was burnt with fire," and that the captain of the guard "brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about." But, Mary, what still more awful and striking expressions does our Lord use in predicting the utter demo-

lition of the second temple and city, as rebuilt in his day? What did he answer to his disciple who exclaimed, "See what goodly stones and buildings are here?"—"Verily I say unto you, these shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be cast down;"—a prediction so literally fulfilled, that the plough was driven by command of Titus over the foundations of the very temple in whose magnificence the disciples were blindly exulting! Let us seek the conclusion of this eventful history, in the last chapter of Chronicles, where it is related in a more spiritual strain, and less mixed up with matter foreign to the main current of the fortunes of God's people. A most important particular is there recorded, viz. the reason why the exact period of seventy years was "determined" by God for the captivity of his people, and the desolations of their land. Tell me what is said upon the subject in the 21st verse.

MARY. "Until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbaths, to fulfill threescore and ten years."

MAMA. Do you know, Mary, to what part of the law of Moses this remarkable verse alludes?

MARY. No, Mama.

MAMA. I will tell you. By a wonderful provision of the Lord of heaven and earth, the land

assigned to his chosen people was (like themselves) to be included in the observance of a stated Sabbath. But as this could not, in reference to tillage, take place every week, one *year* instead of *day* in seven, was claimed by God as his own; during which the soil, the gift of His bounty, was to lie fallow, as a token of His sovereignty over it, and a test of its occupiers' obedience.

MARY. But, Mama, how could the people live if no corn grew once in seven years?

MAMA. Because, my dear, God specially provided for his own sabbatical year by the double plenty of the preceding harvest. Don't you remember a similar gracious provision for the due observance of the weekly Sabbath in the wilderness?

MARY. Oh! you mean when manna enough came on the sixth day of the week to serve the seventh likewise.

MAMA. Exactly. Now, the Israelites having neglected for a long time these annual Sabbaths of their God, just so many years as compensated the neglect were appointed for their own exile, and the consequent rest from tillage of their country! You see here a striking instance of God's vindication of his ordinances, in regard to which he has always shewn himself a peculiarly "jealous"

ous God." May we never, my dear, have to atone by exile from his presence and favour in Heaven for Sabbaths profaned and withheld from Him on earth. But, oh! Mary, if a "jealous," he is also a merciful God; for the sun of His people cannot set, as we have seen it do, amid clouds and thick darkness, without a gracious hope of future restoration piercing through the gloom! In the same chapter which contains the fearful record of His wrath, we have the cheering foretaste of the better times in store for Judah under the reign of "Cyrus the Persian," a prince called by his very name (like Josiah whom we read of yesterday), near an hundred years before he was born to take a part in the inscrutable purposes of God. On these it would be beyond our present limit to enter; nor would it be desirable to weaken (even by sharing the anticipations of a pious writer) the salutary impression which ought to remain on our minds, after following to its awful consummation the "fierce anger" of Jehovah on his chastened though not annihilated people.

My dear Mary, "these things," says an Apostle, "happened unto them for ensamples." If we doubt that a course of unrepented sin can alienate us from God, let us look at Judah weeping by the rivers of Babylon, and then look home at ourselves, "lest there be also in us an evil heart."

of unbelief in departing from the living God." If we feel inclined to slight his ordinances, or, more dreadful still, to despise his salvation, let us remember how Judah sadly kept her Sabbaths in silence and desolation, and how, in vengeance of a later and more fatal offence against Him and his "dear Son," Jerusalem is trodden under foot of the Gentiles," until the time of the restoration of all things ; until He who hath dispersed shall gather again the "outcasts of Israel," and they "whose casting away hath been the reconciling of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles," shall, in "their receiving again," be, not to themselves only, but to millions of their fellow-creatures, as "life from the dead."

THE END.

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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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